

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA
SAN DIEGO

Mrs. Geo. W. Logan

From

Mrs E. C. Blume

Aug-1921

1805-10th Ave

Oakland
Calif

THE SIN OF ANGELS

"Cromwell, I charge thee fling away ambition;
By that sin fell the angels."

P5
3503
I18
S5
1912

THE SIN OF ANGELS

BY

MARTHA GILBERT DICKINSON BIANCHI

*Author of "A Modern Prometheus," "The Cuckoo's
Nest," "A Cossack Lover," etc.*

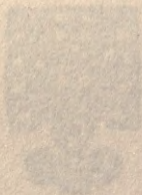


NEW YORK
DUFFIELD & COMPANY

1912

THE SIN OF ANGELS

COPYRIGHT, 1912,
BY DUFFIELD & COMPANY



NEW YORK
DUFFIELD & COMPANY
1912

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	A VACANT TABLE	I
II	RALEIGH PAYNE	18
III	AT SKY HIGH	37
IV	RIDING ALONE	59
V	THE MESSENGER OF BELGRADE	79
VI	SHADOWS CAST BEFORE	106
VII	THE WINTER OF THEIR DISCONTENT	125
VIII	THE WHITE SWALLOW	141
IX	"SOME LITTLE TALK OF ME AND THEE"	154
X	ON THE PILLOW OF DOUBT	173
XI	A COMMENTARY IN CARDS	197
XII	FORGETTING	216
XIII	A WARNING	240
XIV	ABSOLUTION	256
XV	A PURITAN SABBATH	271
XVI	TRENT	294
XVII	TWO BANKS OF A RIVER	312
XVIII	THE WISDOM OF A DREAM	333
XIX	THE POSTMAN	349
XX	AN ISSUE RAISED	366
XXI	THE WAY OF THE WORLD	385
XXII	AN ISSUE EVADED	414
XXIII	THE TEST OF MONEY	436
XXIV	THE ROYAL WAY OF THE CROSS	457
XXV	THE SIN OF ANGELS	483

TO
GASTON

THE SIN OF ANGELS

CHAPTER I

A VACANT TABLE

HIGH noon at Püppe's marks social high-tide during the season at Carlsbad. At evening Society breaks up. In the morning it is disintegrated, drinking its prescribed waters at springs warranted to reduce undesirable avoirdupois, and reproduce an appearance of lost youth if not lost illusion;—or being borne in the seclusion of bath-chairs to the various treatments incidental upon a "cure." At noon, however casual or however exclusive the guest may be, Püppe's is the universal rendezvous with all the world. Here, as at the Casino, the desultory crowd is more aristocratic than at Monte Carlo, less dull than that of an English watering place. There is a certain sanity, a self-conscious distinction observable in the "public" on parade, and while to the naked eye of the uninstructed, the men and women who pass and re-pass may present no ostentatious claim, the initiated often know their titles to be of Europe's proudest. The breeding of the women alone is at-

tested by their quiet, beyond need of that louder personal advertisement so frequently adopted by their sisters of a self-made democracy or the half-world, so the atmosphere gains, in spite of the inevitable human motley of any cosmopolitan crowd. A King at home is always a King, though he discard a crown for an Alpine hat and style himself the Count of Nothing-in-Particular. And at Carlsbad royalty habitually masquerades among common humanity; enjoying the secret of Polichinel shared in good humour with all, since the cares of state dare not approach the charmed circle of nominal disguise.

On a certain noontide in July nearly a dozen summers ago, the difficulty in securing tables or even single places for déjeuner was frankly perplexing the management. The maître d'hôtel was in despair. The director had even condescended to leave his sacred retreat, where he dwelt as a myth upon Olympus no matter what the emergency below, and stood frowning at a situation so serious, — and in reality so much to his entire satisfaction, covering his complacency with a manner of anxiety that deceived no one. Many breakfast parties made up of varying nationalities, aristocratic and assured, were standing unreckoned in the gala swarm that ate and drank unconcernedly before them. It was warm and bright after several days of cold rain, so the terrace of course was earliest

filled. The inner balcony, glass enclosed, was overflowing until even the musicians had been routed and placed upon the stairway to relieve a little more of the coveted space. The great main floor of the caravansary was alive with colour and motion. The summer hats of the women gave an effect of gay parterres, and the white flannels of the men mingled brightly with the uniforms of many grades of officers. Two places only remained vacant. These were at a table by a most desirable window, and to them all new-comers were instantly attracted, only to be warned suavely away by the attending garçon, whose especial responsibility it seemed to be, and who appeared rather complacent than annoyed as the attention exacted by his coveted location increased.

Two men, who had nearly finished their breakfast at a table near, delayed from mere curiosity to see for whom it was being reserved. A French man and woman, who were waiting to slip into their places shrugged impatiently and moved on, — the woman murmuring “Bête!” under her breath. An Austrian officer next approached, with his wife, evidently a Viennese from the beauty of her feet as she drew back her skirt to be seated, with a gesture of authority. The two men looked at her with interest, but instantly the deprecating garçon had bowed them off and re-set the chair at its exact original angle. The table was not re-

served for them. The Frei-Herr of untold acres must seek further. A breathless German next attempted it, insisting loudly that a third place be laid on the end for his near-sighted daughter, who had already caught up the "*carte du jour*" and was holding it close to her nose, expostulating as to the dearness of the fruit. Then a gay party of voluble Americans drifted by, criticising the management freely for the reservation — "Why, even at the Church of the Advent in New York the seats are only held for pew-owners until after the second lesson!" protested a shrill girlish treble. Her escort's reply was inaudible. The two friends, who were amusing themselves with the trivial little incident, smiled at each other comprehendingly. The older man might have been an American from anywhere. He was a good looking affair of fifty or more, who knew how to get what he wanted almost anywhere, without making any fuss about it. He was a cosmopolitan, who did not forget how to speak pure English on his return to his native land after either a short or long sojourn abroad, and who remembered American modes and manners without professed astonishment. Although perfectly at home in France, where he had family connections as well as business interests, he never interlarded his mother tongue with Gallic interjections or idiomatic lapses so affected by younger diplomats of less serious experience than his own.

Some of his friends considered his extreme simplicity rather over-done, but he had remained uncorruptedly himself, in face of all temptations, preferring to remain an American gentleman to a polished imitation of a foreign importation. To the gentle hint of his waiter now, "If M'sieur has quite altogether finished—" He quietly took up the card, and glancing over it, ordered a sweet and some fruit. The crestfallen servant moved away. He had hoped to get rid of them and earn a second or even a third fee. This eating by *petite vitesse* was most undesirable! And men alone, with no women to create the situation! It was too bad! And in his turn he murmured "Bête!" as he filled the order he had provoked by his haste.

The younger man of the two was keenly of the American type, but with so much will in his face that it stood him in stead of all other distinction at a first glance. He was watching with intent eyes the manipulation of a couple of his countrymen bent also upon the empty table by the window. At the waiter's repeated remonstrance one of them had put a gold piece in the open hand. But even the American argument had failed. The man passed on, gold in hand, as if an open bribery to some more greedy *garçon* to hurry his *clientèle*.

"Getting interested?" asked the older man who had intentionally delayed their finish.

"Yes, rather. Let us see it out," said the other.

"For whom do you suppose it is being saved? Want to wager on it?"

"Some nameless crowned head possibly,—just a farce of advertisement perhaps—calling attention to the crowd—"

"Some American on his bridal tour more likely, who has no idea what it is going to cost him!"

"Whoever it is, is going to be made conspicuous enough when he does come, if that is his object!"

"I like to see an object attained, even if it is only a fool object."

"Yes, you do," assented the older man thoughtfully. "You are a real Payne, Raleigh. Your ambition includes every minor goal in its path. Some men see only the stakes, but you keep your eyes fixed on the winning point without losing an advantage or missing a trick in between."

"I usually know pretty definitely what I want," the younger man admitted modestly, without boasting, but as if honesty compelled admission of the fact.

"You never forget it, either. That is the wonderful part of it in a man barely twenty-five."

"I let the other fellows do the forgetting, Uncle Steven."

Steven Randall let his gaze stray out to the flowers gleaming brilliant in the unshaded sunlight of the terraces beyond. The fountains were leaping like a sob of Nature.

“If you never live to regret that you have lost the power of forgetting —” he began, more as if thinking aloud than speaking to his nephew Raleigh Payne.

The boy seemed hard to him sometimes ; repelled him by this very lack of power to lose himself in any exquisite moment or emotion. It was a quality unassociated with youth, and one that might mean atrophy of emotion in time, or some big achievement by virtue of concentration in one supreme channel.

He felt instinctively that channel would in his nephew be Self. Raleigh had a tenacity, even in detail of minor value, that seemed likely to foretell his career. Here, for example, they had been storm-stayed, but there had been no thought on Raleigh’s part of leaving, until the sun shone and yielded up all the charm of sky and forest peak he had expected and demanded. It had rained half-heartedly, made a feint of clearing, and then poured from leaden skies. The tapering pines had been swept by gust after gust. The thunder had rolled through the mountains encircling the town, and shaken the glasses on hotel tables, but no clear-up had followed its sullen withdrawal. Everyone had been depressed. Many disgruntled tourists had taken a disappointed departure. The water stood in the streets and the hackney cabs were so wet they gave out strange odours of mingled upholstery

and stable. When the sun did wink at the golden crown on the pavilion of the Royal Hotel, it made the contrast garish. No one wanted to stop indoors, yet outside it was too wet to permit of the usual forms of distraction. Hence the world was at Püppe's and lingering there because it did not know what to do with itself next.

"I hate an afternoon clear-up," said Steven Randall, cutting his pear as if to make the occupation last as long as possible. "I always want to go to bed and begin the day all over again with a bath and coffee. One's clothes are wrong and one's point of view is off colour. It is as if the lime-light was thrown on the stage carpenters instead of the lovers on the balcony. Even my thoughts that did very well for a rainy day, seem prosaic in this dazzle, and my spirits need varnishing too. The great joyous thing I was vaguely waiting to do when it stopped raining suddenly eludes me." He let himself go a trifle in time to the music, that was setting fire to many sluggish hearts and torpid livers with its Hungarian rapture.

"I intended to take the two best climbs before I left,—whenever that might be; and one this afternoon, no matter what the weather was," said Raleigh.

"And I had intended to play a little bridge, always smoking, and now I shall have to get into walking togs and climb a peak with you, I suppose,

while the pines trickle raindrops down my neck." He ate his pear even more slowly, still waving one hand a trifle, in time with the music.

The great skeleton of a clock over the main entrance was already past the hour of setting out, if they were really intending to go, but neither made the move. Curiosity had intervened. And even so slight a check to his will, once recognised, became to Raleigh Payne worth surmounting; had its relation to some remote connection with the indomitableness of his inner spirit. So they sat on, listening to the music. It was indicative of the older man in many ways, that he had passed the stage when he felt it part of being a cosmopolitan to pay the musicians to repeat his favourite tunes wafted over from Paris. He had arrived at that point where he let other men, newer to their Europe, pay for the music, which he simply enjoyed, smoking quietly, keeping time unnoticeably,—remembering, perhaps.

"Rather an expensive joke," commented the younger man, looking over the bill again offered by the discouraged waiter. Steven Randall turned a serious face upon him.

"My boy," he said, "it comes high to have your own way in anything. Whether you win your spurs in a sudden spurt or under slow fire, or in the long pull of lonely self-surrender. Everything costs! You can't move unless you go and

keep going. Every picture ever painted cost more bitter self-denial than religion ever dared ask of a man. It means hunger, thirst, days down the river, nights under the stars. Never mind what river,—death perhaps,—or what stars,—those over Eden or any other especial garden, from which one is shut out. It costs all the joy of young philandering put by,—the longing for companionship and gaiety and motion denied, to sit with one's back to the joy of the world outside the window, and slowly, line by line, finger by finger, master the results, the relentless technique of one's art and justify its dominion over one. It means to curse the music of voices that rise up from the street in springtime, to put from one the visions of warm fields, as one would shun the Evil one himself. Ah, Lad, Lad! Any success costs bitter hours!"

Raleigh flushed. "I will have it though!" he cried. "You have left out the reverse of the medal. There is the sheer joy of being possessed by one's idea. There is the oblivion that stamps out the rest of the world and all its ways—the reaction after a long strain, when one goes out and wrings one's hands and whispers half sensible gratitude to God Almighty that it is coming! Coming, somewhere near one's determination! Let it cost what it may! At any cost I will have it!" he repeated—"I will!"

"Yours is the sin by which the angels fell," said

Steven Randall, but he stopped there — his attention caught back to their actual surroundings by a sudden swaying of servile backs occasioned by the entrance of a party of three, who in turn approached the forbidden table.

Instantly the two chairs were drawn back, but the waiting garçon was not permitted more, for the maître d'hôtel himself stood ready to place one, and a grey-haired servant stood already behind that of his mistress, with whom he had entered. She was a tiny, weazened aristocrat, agéd and bent over her ebony stick like some fairy godmother, dressed too young for her years and with eyes still brilliant from compliments long lavished upon them by voices long dead perhaps. With her was only a little girl.

And somehow both men felt the child was an instance of the special, the unique and distinctive and that the instant was characteristic, not universal. Her face was pointed, the eyebrows delicate but emphatic. Under dark lashes her eyes were already half closed by some innate instinct of coquetry; probably inherited from some woman adored and perhaps adoring, more probably faithless. Her colour was that of the wild rose. She was slight and tall, of a daintiness unspeakable. A witchery of childhood was hers, coupled with a sophistication of birth. Her manner of accepting the situation of the table, the attendance and serv-

ice of *hors d'œuvre* was gracious. A woman of the Court might have studied its condescension. It implied her aware of the honour of serving her, yet was charming in its sweet unconsciousness. She chatted with her aged companion as any woman of the great world. She commended each "plat" in turn and found fault with nothing, but frowned furiously when a fork slipped clattering to the marble floor drawing all eyes for an instant in her direction. She prattled continuously of the sunshine, her play, and the music brought an intense expression to her face very unusual in a child so young. Nothing she said seemed an affectation. She was evidently making her little effort to amuse her *vis à vis* as if the rôle of hostess devolved upon her. The taciturn old grandam opposite thought in directly opposite proportion to her speech. Those brilliant old eyes lost nothing of the impression created by the child. "A convent was certainly the place for her, and at once,—at once—" was the decision arrived at behind that cold and deeply powdered exterior. Yet in her own mind the Countess de Lamoureux doubted not that the nuns would have a few extra beads to tell after listening to the *bébé's* chatter! A sardonic smile played across her intelligence, as she recalled several recent instances of scandalously diverting repetitions, given by those innocent lips. Inconceivably the knowledge of the grown up world

seemed always to have been hers, from her cradle. "She was a born coquette. It had been to laugh, to see her playing 'mariage' with the little Spanish Duke last evening in the Salon; exulting at his discomfiture as she paired her cards until he was left weeping, with the solitary card of unrequited love in his chubby fist! Truly there was something of the legend of mad Rudolph and his Marie in her love for conquest, and passionate indifference to convention, even already." So she sat eating her pâté with only a monosyllable now and then for the little girl; going forward and backward in her own mind, and the two men at the table next sat on, liqueur following liqueur. The strangers made a brief luncheon. When it was over the little girl summoned the *maitre d'hôtel*.

"All has been very well," she said serenely, and nodded to the white-haired family servant to attend to the bill. "You may conduct me to the garden now." The *maitre d'hôtel* bowed obsequiously as she slid off her chair like any child. A lady beckoned to her. An officer blew her a kiss through his cigarette smoke. Others signalled her, but she came straight toward Raleigh Payne and stood looking up at him through her dark lashes.

"Why did you not wish me to come and speak with you, M'sieur?" she asked.

"I?" he stammered, disconcerted.

"Is it that I do not please you?"

"But I did not have the honour to know your little Highness!" he explained.

"I came because of that,—that you did not invite me. I detest the stranger men who are so 'bête' as to beckon me in public places," she said, flushing indignantly.

A German woman, evidently her governess, came hastily toward them,—

"Madame the Countess desires that you will not converse with the unknown gentleman," she said, glancing toward the grandam for confirmation of her orders.

"Mon Dieu! But he desires to talk with me! And I also desire — so —" she shrugged her shoulders and made a baby grimace to express the situation. "How the old are difficult! Triste!" she cried, turning back to Raleigh Payne. "Come," she begged, offering him her hand. "Come out in the garden with us and I will let you hold Frou Frou. She is sure to be well to-day for she was so suffering yesterday we believed she must die. She had eaten a lizard probably. Such cold things are bad for one. I am never permitted to eat iced food."

The governess looked the picture of distress, blushing a tight, leathern blush more unbecoming every instant.

"Come," repeated the child. "Come and play with me. I find you are adorable."

"Oh, Mademoiselle!" gasped the governess.

"Well, what have I done?" she asked, turning still to Raleigh.

"Nothing, Petite. Only we say charming or nice, to strangers. Adorable is a grown-up word," he assured her.

"Then when I am grown up, I will tell you, you are adorable!" she laughed mischievously.

"Thank you," he said, bowing very low. He was not an ungraceful man. "And will you marry me when you are grown up?"

"Frankly no," she replied without hesitation. "You would never be a suitable parti for me, M'sieur. I am the Countess Stephanie Marie Louise Graubach von Lichtenberg. It is true, I might be able to love you,—but alas! you will be long dead when I am grown up, a jeune fille of marriageable age."

Her mockery pricked him.

"I may not. It will not be so many years," he warned her.

"But I shall marry diplomatically," said the bébé Stephanie. "My grandmother will arrange it, as my father is dead and I have no mother. But if my 'Mari' is old and ugly, certainly I can love you, the same as now. All the Court ladies in Vienna love someone, you know. The bon Dieu says it is their duty to love, and so — oh, they tell me all their legends! The beautiful wife of the

greatest general in Austria said, when I was playing near, very quietly and unobserved, 'To love, — to deceive,— what choice have we? We must be quick to deceive as we are deceived. We women must of a necessity be sage!'" She flashed him a smile of innocent youth and amorous conceit, as the governess now drew her forcibly away, in response to an authoritative motion of the old Countess' stick.

Both men rose instinctively and stood as the formal exit was in process. Then Raleigh Payne said quietly:

"I shall marry that child."

"How about your engagement to Christine?"

"I admit I am not free at the moment."

"And as to the necessary fortune for such an undertaking?"

"I can make it."

"Of course you are talking beyond your book," said Steven Randall lightly. "You frightened me for the moment."

"I am not talking beyond my intention," Raleigh replied. "I have done whatever I set out to so far in life. And I repeat that I shall marry the bébé Countess Stephanie Marie Louise Graubach von Lichtenberg."

"If you do you will regret it," said Randall with equal gravity.

"Why?"

"Because she is a subject for the 'grande' passion,' as they understand it over here."

"You think an American is incapable of that, given the feminine incentive?"

"The only passion an American understands is Ambition. You will prove it."

CHAPTER II

RALEIGH PAYNE

RALEIGH PAYNE in knickerbockers had discovered for himself that the battle was to the strong and the race to the swift, the assertions of the wise notwithstanding. Having made this discovery he acted up to it. He was a masterful boy with a genius for creating the impression he desired, to gain his private ends. For example, as a mere lad being punished by an early and supperless bed hour, he had inspired his younger brother with such envy, by his description of the fun he was having, that the little fellow cried bitterly to be included in the game. In the preparatory school to which he was sent, pride kept him up to a high mark, and whatever befell him, he made a brave showing; turning the silver linings of his clouds to the school world with amazing persistence for a boy. In college, though not of sufficient brain to take honours easily, he had kept himself conspicuous by one means after another. What he lacked in mental calibre, he made up in assurance, until it persuaded his world and himself that it was the same thing. An appearance of success was necessary to his very existence.

Popularity gave him the management of athletic interests he had not the brawn to distinguish himself by serving on the field, and hard study while other men slept kept him ahead of men of greater intellectual power but less force of will. It is doubtful if he studied for love of the classics he read, or the speculative courses through which he cut a shining way. But it is certain that in any contest with his fellows he was acutely conscious of the sting of rivalry, and dogged to his appointed end. He seemed to do little for the intrinsic love of it, but rather to take life as an extensive gymnasium, in which he was perpetually straining his muscles to tenser endurance, and expanding his chest measure to deeper inhalation and wider measurement. For so young a man he was considered singularly aware of opportunity in any guise. The envious said that he adored success at any cost. He knew the right people, wasted no time on any others, made no impulsive mistakes in his friendships, yet escaped being branded as a snob, by a well bred instinct that made him shrink from a policy that involved truckling to fate or society. He felt superior to that. He was too sure of himself to admit other dependence. In his pleasures he never quite lost his sober balance through the excitement of any rosy moment. Joy could not tip the scale of judgment. He danced well and wisely with the most attractive girls. He was far

from being a zealous missionary to the overlooked, nor did the cotillion find him favouring the plain. So exclusive were his attentions that they came to be held as a distinction,—a sort of college decoration, so sparingly bestowed as to be valuable. He held that society was but another arena for a man's personal development. In it his success must be only measured by his ambition, as in the jostling issues of life beyond the college walls. His class day oration was a stirring appeal for individualism, which was only saved from sounding like a call to higher selfishness by the earnest conviction of the young orator, of clear cut features and prophetic eyes, whose voice magnetised while he spoke, whatever cooler thought may have found to condemn in his propaganda.

His engagement to Christine Brand, two years later, had been at the time considered a vindication of his principles and a rather brilliant thing for him. Christine was not without a distinct ambition of her own, to which Raleigh appealed, as he was well aware. Her father's political affiliations were flatteringly possible as assets for his own career, if he chose to avail himself of them to the exclusion of his literary plans. His love-making was, it is true, something of an after-thought, but his handsome person and the universal admiration accorded him by his inner circle probably assured the girl of her good fortune, and filled the vacancy

of heart she might have realised, had Raleigh been a less striking figure. In her father's Washington mansion as well as on the family estate up country, Raleigh at once established a recognition of his importance. Christine's father treated him as a man whose advice could at least be asked and conceded a hearing. His address commended him to the politicians and men of large affairs with whom the two homes were constantly thronging.

"How does that strike you, Raleigh?" was often on the older man's lips. Or, "where's the flaw there, Raleigh? Your eyes are younger than mine and ought to be keener!"

It was a flattery immensely stimulating, and true to his ideals, the younger man made the most of it, studying men and affairs, reading with a new and critical interest that made history but revived politics, and politics but living history.

It was not long before, yielding to the excitement of these influences, he saw the political vista opening before him and left his muse to follow. The pen might well be mightier than the sword, but the tongue could out-wit both. Literature ceased to be his medium the moment he saw a swifter, more brilliant path.

It was his first parting with his headstrong, boyish ideal for himself. He was too much absorbed by the dazzling chance for a political career

to estimate the loss to his intrinsic standards with any justice. His uncle, Steven Randall, had tried to hold him back. A seasoned diplomat himself, too well versed in political manipulation not to be disillusioned, he felt his nephew's desertion of so high and revered a calling, with a degree of regret that was almost bitterness. He had lived for diplomacy, and knew its intricate charm too well to gainsay the boy's increasing infatuation. It broke his own dreams rudely, however; dreams in which Raleigh and Christine were placed at Sky High during the long summers he loved to spend in his country home up in the New Hampshire hills; dreams in which they were to perpetuate the family line, and bequeath an honoured name to letters. At the end of a year of this indefinite preparation for public life, Steven Randall had invited him to travel for a year, preliminary to a definite diplomatic appointment. To Raleigh's great satisfaction, Christine had seen at a glance that two men, one of whom was quite at home in most of the inaccessible corners of Europe, could see the world to better advantage than a young husband and wife on their own initiative, and presumably oblivious to any horizon beyond each other's eyes. He had no trouble in drawing a telling contrast between the relative value to his career, of a honeymoon laid in some Italian coast village, with letters of introduction for Berlin and

Vienna unopened, unrepresented, or perhaps met with impersonal indifference and turned over to inferiors, — and the charming ease of informal presentations made by a man of letters, who had served in more than one intricate international arbitration. He had specialised in language and history during two years of graduate work, and his uncle's offer came as the crowning reward of his own effort. It all depended on whether Christine was going to insist on their marriage and hamper his movements. Happily she had not. She had been reasonable, that is unselfish, and sent him off in perfect harmony with himself unmarred by one expression of reproach.

For which he had characteristically rewarded her by wondering if it was in her to care much for any man,—aside from his position in the world? She was a fit mate for him, he decided, for of course she must have hated to put off the wedding. Yet she had understood to a fraction, the importance of it all to him. She was like him in many ways. He was content with her for awhile, and at times proud of his perspicacity in choosing her. After a glimpse of several governments, including a court and an empire, his ideas had changed and enlarged astonishingly. Personal experience with embassies and legations taught him surprising lessons. Inefficiency stirred his blood with its suggestion of all inefficiency might mean. The stupendous work-

ing of harmonious precedent set him reconstructing the weak places in his own government with a sure touch. The little girl at Carlsbad had opened his eyes to a possibility in women, far beyond the mere domestic respectability and matter-of-course comradeship offered him by a girl like Christine. How was she to cope with a civilisation whose baby-talk was beyond her comprehension? What was she worth as secondary support in a life of continental intrigue? If a man seriously meant diplomacy, should not his wife be a decoration worn on his breast rather than a button on his uniform? French women, Austrians, Italians, were a gauzy cloud of witnesses for his new obsession. The fine, clear quality he had admired in Christine suddenly seemed ineffective. Her directness became inartistic. Her lack of finesse recalled the jokes he had heard at the expense of the honest unpolished wives of the American representatives abroad. He remembered her rigidly correct French, which was at best but a grammatical translation of English prose, rendered word for word without idiomatic bias. He wondered if, after all, he had done the best thing for himself in such an engagement. Many of the most successful diplomats were unmarried. The wrong woman would be far more impeding than none. He saw that, from every approach to the subject. It was characteristic of him, that deciding there was a better, though beyond his reach, he

unhesitatingly discarded his best without regret or scruple.

True, the prestige afforded him by Christine's father had been of importance to him in the introductory passages of his life. But was a man to stop there? When any relation ceased to have the power and the glory was it not already over? He had but employed the nearest means to insure his own recognition. This was now to a certain extent secure. Why should one persist in using a tool no longer sharp enough to carve one's name upon the hard metal of the world, though one's own hand had blunted the instrument in its first awkward attempts of apprenticeship? Raleigh had never taken a blow without gathering fresh resistance. He had never failed without accepting a secret lesson of how he might have succeeded. Was it likely he would spare the girl to whom he had pledged his word, if she became unequal to the stride he was setting himself? His nerve and pride alike responded to the challenge of the little ten-year-old Countess Stephanie, baby though she was. The distance between them only heightened her charm for him. He was under the first glamour of an aristocracy and either forgetful or ignorant that class, not the individual, determines the goal of the European of rank, and that foreordination is more easily laughed down the wind than caste. From that high noon at Carlsbad, through eight

years of persistent success, he followed his little star at a discreet distance; always pushing his diplomatic connection, always increasing his modest fortune by clever speculation. He knew the Convent of the Holy Mother where she was ostensibly at school, but really out of her grandmother's way, and he ventured to send her bonbons and even an occasional gift. With his offering his card only was enclosed. Never a word more to interrupt the rule of the Sisters, or blur her first impression of him. This continued until she must have been eighteen, when his gift came back to him, briefly inscribed by the postal authorities "Not Here." He was unable to be in France for a year after, or he would have gone to the convent for news of her. It was not until a second year had passed, a year full of intricate and promoting achievement, that he met her suddenly face to face at a ball in Vienna, wearing a jewelled bracelet, his last gift to her. Her convent days were over; her own struggle with the world well begun.

At sight of her his romance had flared into full flower. The negotiations undertaken had been prompt and daring. They were in the nature of a coup long premeditated on his part. Who was he to presume for the hand of a child of the blood? This was the attitude he expected. And he was not disappointed. His credentials, duly presented, were indisputable. His fortune sufficient and over-

estimated fortunately by those nearest to him. He had some little literary distinction to add to his credit,—and yet, and yet—he perfectly calculated the weakness of his strength and the strength of his adversary's weakness in the struggle before him. His interview, for he had but one with the old Countess de Lamoureux, had been insulting to his spirit and wounding to his pride, but he had not allowed himself to be jostled in his pretension. In the end, after humiliating him by Austrian insolence, making every possible demand and tolerating him only on sufferance, he had prevailed. He won out by a fluke, the old countess having easily out-diplomatised him, but the wizened old beldam let him go without a suspicion of her real reasons. And so he won,—the means were all the same to Raleigh Payne. It was by virtue of a blot on the lady's scutcheon that he got her. He might, or might not have felt he had done well, if he had heard the beldam chuckle through her random teeth like an autumn wind, to her old adviser, the Master of the Chancellerie, in defence of her irregular action and consent. “No dot and a history! Stephanie may well take her millionaire Pretender and bless all her Saints for the chance!” But the very uncertainty of Stephanie herself, that had made her so greatly a burden to her grandmother, was as yet hid from his dazzled eyes. In her brief taste of the world men had been quick to offer her

irregular relations. She might have been the dearest friend of the Emperor's own son. Why she had not, she could hardly have told herself. Probably from a whim of her own, that she would love as well as be adored. She was capable of a fault where she loved. The old countess knew that very well, but love would be her price. Without passion no indiscretion would be committed. There had been one man she might have followed, if a hint from her grandmother had not suppressed him. A man of redoubtable fascination he was, though a sort of soldier of fortune, employed ostensibly in newspaper work to cover imperial orders most imperatively secret. His government office had kindly removed him to a remoter sphere of action, taking his ill-starred love affair in hand just in time to save an esclandre on the brink of publicity. He was wiped out in a night, and the girl left to her own conjecture as to the reason of their ruptured intimacy. Whatever the countess suspected no one ever knew, but the grand-daughter and herself. It is quite possible that the incident served as an object lesson pressed home. Stephanie might or might not have known her own story, but within the high and narrow court circle it marred her future beyond repair. Despite the protection afforded by her grandmother's second marriage with the French de Lamoureux, an alliance fit for beauty like hers was not for her. Not simply because her

mother had been a dancer, or because her father had ruined himself for her and disgraced his name, but that sunk until forced to accept whatever compromising office was left him, he had been caught and branded as a spy in the service of his government, which exposed him, paid him and disowned him discovered. Misfortune and dishonour had stiffened the spine of the old countess, his mother, who had become even more arrogantly exclusive, more outrageous in presumption on every downward step taken by her only son. The little girl, always an ungrateful care to her, as a woman became an insupportable embarrassment. She had been brought up at watering places where she saw and heard over-much, and in Paris where her grandmother's friends were too careless to lower their voices of scandal before the presumable innocence of youth. In Vienna she had been handed over to servants and a governess; playing in gardens where sculptured nymphs and satyrs rioted in fountained forms, whose waters threw a rainbow glamour over the flowers; and in long mirrored-chambers that taught her the grace of her tall little body and the joy of her ravishing feet in their absurdly high heels and monster bows or flashing buckles. Indeed many an American matron surmised less of human psychology, than this pretty bébé had overheard, or by some strange unyouthful process stored away by intuition, to

make good the lack of maternal precept in her days of experience yet to come. The convent had softened her childish boldness, restraining her manner and expression only to drive her instinct in on itself. She had learned the "extase" of religion and translated it into terms of personal passion. She had learned to lower her eyes with virgin modesty, but her heart was no less open to the seductions of her imagination. The sacred intimacy with the holy Saints of both sexes insisted on by the Sisters, had fired her with a confused mingling of pious and profane intimations. Every priest was an Abelard, though none offered her the rôle of Heloise. Her grandmother's rein had been scarcely less rigid as she grew older, and between the convent restraint and the etiquette of the court imposed upon her without mercy, she fell to the foreign woman's only freedom,—marriage.

Raleigh flung himself at his conquest of her as he had at the other prizes he had coveted. He flattered himself that a millionaire poet, at the same time a rising diplomat, was equal to tipping the scale of a Viennese alliance. The million was scanty and the poetry not of the finest, still to an undowered girl the fortune was not so bad, and he had no fear that Stephanie would see that his poetry lacked the glow of old beauty or starkly phrased thought. He was in love with her, wanted her, meant to have her. He also meant to have

not only her grandmother's consent but her own. He read her romanticism, and dared an excess of it he would have feared to show to Christine. He had used influence, finessed, assaulted, and at last almost carried her by storm. Is it God or Nature that moves a girl to return the last one of a furious rain of kisses poured upon her, while she struggles in a lover's arms? However much she may have intended to resist, the curiosity of love, the desire for freedom were mingled in her acceptance of him with something not unlike fascination. Stephanie, the first year after leaving her convent, was a strangely bewildering softened variation of the vivid little girl of Raleigh's Carlsbad memories. It was due perhaps to the religious life about her during the impressionable years of girlhood. The modulated order of her days, the continual twilight of the soul in which she revolved, the reverent tones and adoring postures of the nuns, the lingering echoes of mass and Ave might have driven from her the hard and sordid world-voices of her childhood. Or it might have been only a more subtle form of the coquetry that had been her birth-right, suppressed,—but nourished by long fasting. Accustomed as he was to American women, she bewildered Raleigh with her mystery and fragrance, her exotic perfection. He was utterly her slave in those days succeeding their marriage, and she tyrannised over him with a power descended of

despots. Everything about her he adored submissively. He had had his own way, and was subservient to the new form of his own will in hers. He was hers, but she was his. This, he never forgot. If he had seen that this was the only way to win her, he kept his knowledge to himself and played the lover as astutely as he had played the diplomat. To men of his type there is but one goal in view until it is attained. And whether Stephanie was ultimately swept away by the sleepless sincerity of his suit, or if she recognised her own critical position too well to risk being declassed by her peers, and resolved to retrieve herself by a solid if loveless marriage, the result was favourable to the American's will. After all why does any woman marry any man? Five years later one reason is as good as another!

After a winter in Washington, where Stephanie had been the success of the season, he went triumphantly on, intoxicated by his own sagacity. His next diplomatic appointment had been distinctly notable. Even the fact of his wife's faith, at first a source of some misgiving to him, had stood him in unexpected stead. Her close relation to a member of the Vatican household had sensibly furthered the outcome of his special mission to Rome; where there were delicate matters of infinite importance to both countries, and even to united Christendom, weighing in hidden balances. If he

had used his Catholic connection to his own advantage, to the point of semi-betrayal, his own government approved his course. And if he had seemed to lend himself to Stephanie's desire, to see him formally within the Catholic communion, only so long as it opened doors otherwise inaccessible, modernism and the twentieth century easily condoned his not actually "going over" in the end. He had asked nothing of Stephanie but to marry him and let him give her the devotion of which he was capable. And she had married him not eagerly, or too reluctantly for his pride, but much as any girl a year from the restraint of a French convent marries the man her guardians designate. He spoiled her in every way he could devise. He lavished the contents of Paris shops upon her and was never so pleased with himself as when surprising her with some intimate trifle that reiterated the closeness of their relation: the right that was his in the bond that bound them. And with the instinct of her mother, perhaps, hot in her veins, she sometimes gave herself to him with an abandon he had never dreamed — moments of exquisite torment to him in her reactions of coldness, when she tired of him, or her love of his vehement caresses was spent. She never said she loved him. He never could make her say it. It seemed to him that her force of passion was strangely impersonal. He could not deceive himself into the belief that

she loved him, even in the closest embrace upon her heart. Indeed was it love, as he had always conceived love, that he felt for her? Love and Lust are twin brothers in many a man's heart. There was nothing of the brave sacrificial spirit of his ideal, in these first onsets of passion. They soon passed the point where poignant pleasure ceases, and becomes inexorable habit. But she was his! Her beauty, her grace, her fire,—that in her which made men stare after her as she passed, were his. His right to her was supreme. And even in Rome she gave no tongue to scandal, though men saw her to desire and were at small pains to conceal their emotions. Sometimes he drew off and wondered over her. It seemed as if some secret scorn of men had rooted in that childish breast, or some guarded bitterness kept her prisoned in a magic circle of her own counsel. She never betrayed herself. He could not imagine that the nuns had inserted this blend of purity and passion. It seduced him beyond reason, yet dreading the result of excess, he allowed himself no relaxation from his predetermined programme. He cherished her beauty, preserved her from illness or fatigue, kept her inviolate, sacred to his career.

And yet he never won her confidence and never found the tranquil satisfaction of certainty as to every event of her past, which he would naturally have claimed from Christine;—who had confessed

all her previous love passages to him the day after their engagement. It had bored him a little at the time, but he supposed it the proper thing. It was different with Stephanie, who, though actually his wife, held her past to herself, if indeed she had any, under a smiling beauty that gave the lie to her ignorance. Sometimes she would chatter gaily of her childhood recollections with their changing rainbow impressions, or of the chastened harmony of the convent. But of what she had felt or suffered, no one word escaped her. Never one clue was dropped that he could follow to her inner self without a rude invasion of what was exclusively her own. He thought he knew every phase of her girlhood, from a distance, and was sure no romance more tangible than vague dreaming had possessed her. But the quality in her that escaped him, tantalised and taunted. Could he be sure? His jealousy turned on him fiercely in those moments of ignorant surmise. He remembered at those black moments the very inflection of her voice, when she had said to him as a child — "But, of course, if my 'Mari' is old and ugly I can love you, M'sieur. All women must love —" And by chance he was himself the "Mari," and though not old, older than she by fifteen years of his best youth. Once she had inadvertently alluded to a summer in Normandy. It was the summer before she met him. But she had hurried over her mention of it

and avoided his interest in the exact spot and date. When he had proposed returning there for a few weeks, she had dismissed it without petulance but in the manner of one who found him stupid. She had not confessed even to her Father Confessor, quite fully perhaps, the madness of that first summer holiday passed with an English schoolmate, whose family had taken her off her grandmother's hands for a compensation. Her first love dream had been a bitter one to her, and to the poor fellow who had lost his mind over her, followed her to Vienna, and left her without a word. He was unique, though she was too young to know it, and the poems he had wasted upon her were still with her in the little black dress basket that always stood in her own room, either at home or in hotels. Poems dyed in the colours of the orient, steeped in the hopeless shadow of the Slav; cries that cut like the blue blade of a sword in the moonlight, seeking the heart,—the only souvenir of her brief and stolen girlhood.

CHAPTER III

AT SKY HIGH

THE second summer after their marriage found them back in America; their headquarters with Steven Randall at Sky High, where Stephanie remained, while Raleigh made his flying trips to and from the city, and the West, and countless destinations, by motor or sleeper, by day and by night, after the manner of the great American men. At first Stephanie had wanted her own establishment, but a short experience proved the wisdom of the present arrangement. "When I talked of a home in the country, I see now why you made an objection," she said to Raleigh, on one of his brief visits between given points.

"But surely your European men are not in residence too long at a time," he reminded her. "The loveliest of their chateaux in France are little more than a nursery, and often their apartment in Paris is only a *pied à terre*."

"And you, Raleigh, have almost as much necessity of a '*pied à terre*' as a humming bird!" she cried. "Like him, you too fly over, but never remain."

"But he always knows where to find the sweetest flower —"

"The flower wishes she had wings," remarked Stephanie irrelevantly.

"A man does what he must," Raleigh said soberly.

"Ah, really? Does he believe it? I had been told a woman did as she must and a man what he would." Raleigh was really troubled by her mood.

"Other men's interests are so inextricably involved, darling. I cannot get out of my treadmill honourably, without risking their results as well as my own."

"So you have said many times," she agreed. "I ought to know that lesson perfectly."

"You have had ever so many disappointments," he exclaimed, recalling all sorts of engagements he had been obliged to break for business reasons.

"Oh, it is of no importance. It is only the first time that one makes a scene. And after, one takes the custom of the country, like the wine." They both remembered the first time. It had been their first real misunderstanding of their relation to each other, and Raleigh's career. It had begun by his sending her off to the theatre without him on her own birthday celebration, and it had evolved into this summer alone at Sky High.

The place lay in the heart of New England, a long mile from the village where the trains only

stopped on signal to drop the occasional wayfarer, who was usually met and whirled away to the sophisticated hermits of the wooded hills, beyond the meadows with their slow-flowing river. The house itself was a spacious, decent mansion, too dignified to be even flauntingly colonial in build. There was a courtyard enclosed on three sides, that gave an English effect as one approached, without seeming an anachronism. There was no imitation Italian garden, no fountain. The great terrace in front gave sharply to the next below, where tall foxglove and dawn shades of phlox held the paths, and the blue of the bee-larkspur blurred on the blue of heaven like a little sister, and the meek Virgin lillies stood in rows behind the pungent peonies in their decorative lines. On the upper terrace the first jonquils and hyacinths gave way later to the roses and heliotrope, and a small lake of mignonette over which the bees like drunken mariners continually lost their bearings to drown in sweetness.

The tall cedars at the northwestern end of the terrace, almost as mysterious as cypress trees, were a solemn sun dial, for when the sun was drawn further and further toward them as summer deepened, their warning shapes lengthened over the grass of an afternoon, as if to remind one that the most exquisite moment might not last.

There was no pergola, nothing foreign or out

of keeping with simple native beauty and love of nature on her own terms. From the low balustrade one looked down over these tiers of bloom, suggestive of the riviera gardens to Stephanie, and away over the valley, across the ribbon of river to the hills and even mountains beyond, rising sharply,—a playground for shadows, trooping all day in fantastic procession beneath the light clouds or portentous thunder heads, and over whose rugged shoulder the sun smiled back a last good-night, like a child regretful to be gone.

From her first introduction Stephanie had bowed to the charm of Steven Randall.

"I shall name you Grandee!" she cried, on seeing him at Sky High surrounded by his characteristic setting.

"I protest!" Steven Randall objected. "I am a democrat of the democrats!"

"On the contrary!" she cried, throwing up her hands with a pretty derision,—“I find you perfectly an aristocracy person!” The language, still so formidable to her, unable to hinder her thought of him. “I am convinced you have Austrian blood in your so patrician veins! One sees it from the way your servants obey at a glance. It is military precision.”

She felt it more and more, as she saw the fear and honour shown him by the people of all degrees among whom he lived. His keen tongue

and all-comprehending heart suggested nobility, as did the pomps and forms of daily life with which he surrounded himself even in his seclusion. The community did indeed bow down and serve him, while he demanded nothing, and would have rebuked her assertion of their attitude impatiently. He did, in fact, combine the respect due to the fifth generation of Godfearing ancestry, with the admiration of a man who, having seen much of the wide world, had chosen the better part at last, his birth-place. To the rural mind this was an unanswerable argument for his good sense and stability, heightening their own valuation of ancestral acres none too fertile, and lives none too eventful.

It was not strange that Stephanie felt the atmosphere of the place. The house was one of archives. It boasted its letters on file from men of note, filled with familiar mention of women and men whose names shone brighter as the years fled on. It had that subtle background of culture and increment of anterior generation. Books and pamphlets carried presentation inscriptions. The various editions of the classics had on their title pages the names of the Randalls from great-grandfather downward. An aristocracy of fine taste, displayed by accumulation of the best in art and richest in friendship, was supplemented by the several congressional libraries, retained, for sentiment's sake, on the walls of the long hall off the

library; evidencing the value of former Randalls to their country's ornament and service. They had been a mental lot, those fine old dead grandfathers, with a cavalier twist in their spirit that accounted for the un-Puritan luxury in the ornate bindings of their Byrons and Keats, and even "Watts and Select";—as well as Steven Randall's own preference for a generous trencher and profuse service. His own father had been the first of them to marry South.

His mother had brought her due share of ancestral silver and ample tradition to mingle with this Northern blood and memory. Archives, legends, recurrent customs, that followed tradition inevitable and unexplained, were here, as became a family of distinction. Stephanie had chosen her own rooms on the north wing, to be nearer the few acres of timberland that skirted that side of the estate. The many birch and beech trees gave it something the effect of a European forest, so free of underbrush and primitive disorder, and made it less lonely to her than the open country. She took her solitary rambles here, always sighing in her heart for the sea. The little dappled lights and scurrying shadows reminded her of Fontainebleau and the quiet reminded her of Sister Angela and the nuns, and prompted her naïve question—"Where really was the difference between a country house in America and the convent in Paris?"

So it happened that she was glad when Raleigh's friend Jim Trent took a cottage a mile or so up the valley,—since another woman might also mean another man, coming and going, guests, visits; something to relieve the situation of its entire monotony when Raleigh was away, attending to mines and meetings and government committees,—where his name appeared as chairman or director in the records of the next day's papers, which she never read. Grandee was glad for his own reasons. He was, from time to time, disabled by a form of heart attack that had seized upon him of late, also an inheritance, accompanying the clawfooted mahogany and fabled ghost which were the family pride. He immediately gave a dinner party where the two women, Raleigh's ex-fiancée and his wife, observed each other without more than opportunity for a mutually reserved judgment.

Stephanie had seen her pass on horseback, riding cross-saddle like any boy, and had heard the sharp Walkyrie cry she gave, in response to the shrill whistle of greeting Grandee always sent her from his high balcony above, which commanded the village highway running along the side of the terraced gardens. They seemed on familiar, even affectionate terms, these two,—the breezy young matron and the fading man of the world. Raleigh spoke of the Trents as family friends of long

standing. It was not until the party broke up, that the two women really measured each other, and took the first position for what might prove a duel of friendship, or a carefully preserved neutrality. Christine was boldly blonde, and built on a generous scale. In her presence, Stephanie made one even more subtly aware of herself as being rare, cherished, adored. To her pretty graciousness of manner, implying more than it expressed of pleasure, and feeling far less,—Christine responded with an unaffected warmth.

“I shall come very, very soon to see you, and really get acquainted!” she promised.

As if any one could ever do that with Stephanie!

Far from cherishing any resentment toward her traitor lover of earlier years, Christine declared herself frankly grateful to him for setting her free for a greater happiness, ready at hand in her beloved Jim.

The first time she found herself alone with him, she extended her hand without a hint of malice, saying, “I want to thank you, Raleigh, for doing me the greatest service any one ever did for me in all my life. I shall never forget to be grateful. If I can ever do anything for you —” the implication was boundless.

It had been distinctly a relief to him at the time, opening the way for restored relations between the families, which might have remained strained.

But otherwise, as he thought of it afterward, he was not sure he liked her being so humbly glad to get rid of him. Though he never doubted her sincerity in every word she said, he remembered for his credit. No one could doubt Christine. They were all soon on terms of country neighbourhood intimacy, less formal than those in town, but with long intervals between visits, according to weather, personal interests or changing mood. One morning in June when Christine had been up on Grandee's balcony, she came down to find Stephanie at the piano in the music room, where the long French windows stood open toward the west.

Stephanie's foot was on the soft pedal. She seemed to be talking to herself, as she ran softly over the keys from time to time, as if completing the expression of unspoken thoughts they touched and dropped away from. She did not entirely stop as they chatted together. Christine was in her habit. Her face was a trifle over-flushed from her vigorous exercise, her eyes full of the glory of the morning.

"It is so good to ride again!" she exclaimed. She had said it twice before. It was the variation her heart was playing round her recently recovered health and happiness.

"You have given it up for some time, then?" Stephanie asked idly.

"Just a year, in all—"

"How stupid! And did you not detest having some one ride your horse? I admire your great beast extravagantly!"

"No one but father's groom, Martin, rode the mare. He kept her in order. But I did miss her ridiculously, for the mother of a family."

"You love to ride very much?"

"You see it has been part of my life," Christine explained. "We rode all the time when we were engaged. We even took our wedding trip on horseback."

"Really? How original. How like two men!" commented Stephanie, sharpening a chord gently.

"Yes, it was fine!" cried Christine, pulling off her long gloves as if again raising her crop to set her mount off on a wild gallop.

"What strong hands you have!" said Stephanie. "Like a man's hand, only so small and white!"

"They are not much for beauty, I will admit," said Christine, laughing. "They can hold a running horse and soothe a little baby, though."

"There is something,—I don't know how to say it,—rather like a goddess about you—" Stephanie said, with her head on one side, critically.

"Too big, you mean?" Christine said it good naturedly.

"Not that,—something; how does it say itself in English? of life, a youth, an abundance—"

"That is only because I am so happy! Jim is an angel, the children are well, the new baby is a seraph, and I am in the heavenly choir all the time. Don't you see?"

"You are fond of children, then?" Stephanie asked, not as a conventional assertion, but really as if in her mind it was a question. Christine stared at her.

"I adore them! Don't you?"

"They are rarely interesting until they are old enough to have a personality —"

"But they are so absorbing!"

"And so inconvenient, Raleigh says."

"Raleigh ought not to say such things. He ought to realise what a companion a child is. He is away so much,—" began Christine, with a young mother's tendency to set the whole world right, after her own scheme of perfection.

"They are not companions, either, until they are older —" objected Stephanie. "Raleigh says they are a form of protoplasm. He finds them crude. Naturally he regards them as a detail of love only, more as one does with us abroad."

"Perhaps they are not companions of the head, in one sense, but they are of the heart," Christine took her up, scandalised. Stephanie shrugged on the piano, at least it sounded so.

"Raleigh says it is not possible to bring up a family when one is so constantly changing place.

Of course his career now is of the very first importance to him. It is impossible for him to think of adopting those responsibilities until he is able to definitely establish himself as he wishes."

Stephanie spoke as if she had been stating their plans for the summer, instead of their deliberate intention to thwart creation of its due, under the divinely appointed authority of heaven. She saw no reason to leave Christine in doubt or ignorance of Raleigh's position. She had the foreign frankness in speech that avoids misleading judgment, however it may embarrass the reticence of the listener.

"Jim has always felt our marriage was exceptional," Jim's wife pursued, convinced of a message and a mission,— "You see, it was not an ordinary love affair, from the start —"

"They never are. Love affairs, I mean," said Stephanie gently.

"Jim is such an altruist! In his second love letter, he said he was sure God had chosen us to interpret the meaning of true love to the world. We feel that we have a message, that there is a great opportunity and responsibility in our exceptional happiness."

"Yes? To whom?" Stephanie queried politely.

"To every one. To the community we live in and to the world. Jim has such noble ideals! He would never be content to rest in his own happi-

ness and not try to influence others through the power that comes from loving and being loved."

"I understand,—he is a socialist d'amour!" cried Stephanie, her eyebrows arched enchantingly over her pleasure at her discovery. Christine drew a long breath.

"Of course if God singles one out for a great happiness or a great sorrow, one must not fail to reach out and give the message as broadly as one can," she gravely insisted.

"And how marvellous it must be to imagine the bon Dieu really concerning himself with one's small affairs, like that!" cried Stephanie, inwardly thanking the saints that Raleigh suffered from no such hallucination, while aloud she asked:

"You do not consider marriage for one's own satisfaction, then?"

"Oh, far, far from it! That seems such a low level of loving. I think of it as a supreme privilege. The joy of it comes from sacrifice, from accepting the solemn responsibilities and giving everything one is to it, without reserve. It is immortal and triumphant, infinite in resource!"

"And you are so young,—and really so very handsome!" admitted Stephanie mystified. "And yes, I believe you are quite sincere. Is it, then, that all the American wives do their marriages in this same public spirit?"

"I suppose the more thoughtful a woman is,

the less she wants to live for herself, whether she marries or not," Christine said slowly. "But I must admit we are ambitious, not for ourselves, but for our husbands. We want them to succeed of course. We do all we can to help them get on."

"It sounds more like business than marriage—"

"It is a sort of partnership, in the highest sense."

"And more like ambition than love," commented Stephanie. "And your freedom,—when does that arrive to you?"

Christine was smiling again. "We have that before we are married. We have so much of it that we do not want any more."

"But surely not! How is it possible? Not when you are in the convent, certainly?"

"Why yes, especially in our school and college days. We do not go to convents for our education very often, in this country. Everybody tells us our school days are our happiest, and helps to make them so. We expect to take up our cares later, so we put them off till we have homes of our own, and when they come, we find they are very sweet, sweeter than any pleasure we knew before."

"And so you cheat life of its 'black beast' all along your route? That is very adroit of you. But with us it is not so arranged. If our marriage were to lay a chain on us, after the impris-

onment of our girlhood, we should be always nothing better than captives. First our guardians, then our husbands would control us. In Europe, after all, a husband is either a convention or a tyrant." Christine pronounced her declaration of independence confidently—"Love attends to all that over here. We forget ourselves when we love, however selfish we may have been before."

"You are a very strange race—" mused Stephanie, running a scale softly. "One finds you so cold, so without passion, so intensely ambitious,—I less and less understand you."

"We are not as temperamental as other races, but of course every woman must work out her own life problem for herself," began Christine reflectively, looking out of the long window where a veerie was nesting confidently in the shrubbery, to the dear familiar meadows beyond.

"Or be content to let it be decided for her"—said Stephanie, breaking into a waltz. Just then Grandee's personal servant entered, "Beg pardon Madame, but Mr. Randall sends word would you play the Viennese waltz you were playing earlier? He regrets to interrupt you, but it is still running in his head."

Christine rose to go. She was not especially musical, and music in the morning seemed out of all drawing to her industrious heart intent on the

welfare of others. After she had ridden away Stephanie played not only the waltzes, but a Hungarian rhapsodie, and then some odd folk songs, with an accompaniment oddly imitative of the bell-like instrument of the Hungarian peasant. Suddenly she began to sing. It was not a large voice, but it had been trained, or one might almost say stained, in the convent by the thrilling intonations of sacred words, and it rose up now through the open windows with striking refreshment to the invalid in his eyrie. To Steven Randall she was the perpetual contribution of the foreign element he loved, in his monotonous days. She never tired him, and his eyes feasted on her piquant and dainty outline, finding in her always the same bewitchment of the little girl in her lace frock and rose-coloured sashes of Carlsbad. When she finished playing, she went to the old-fashioned pier glass between the long windows. It seemed more like home to her than any other feature of her surroundings. She accosted her own image in it fondly, if a trifle resentfully. To Christine outside, the glory of green on the lush meadow-land by the river, where some acres of grass were waving yet, and the odour of hay being made close below, came up with the joy of the familiar. Not only this summer day was in her nostrils, but all the hot long summer days of a country child's revived recollection. She had ridden in on the

fragrant humpy loads of hay that the elms tore at, and the blackberry vines snatched for, as they toiled past up the hill. She had lain still under the eaves of the great cool barn, and been delighted to find herself so near the dark roof and giant spider webs, or to look down from this high point of vantage right into the nest of an oriole, swung in the branches near. To Christine, it all brought back the sweetness and sanity of real things. She knew the honest hunger and thirst of the toilers in the torrid sun of the noontide. The primal joy of rest, the assuaging coolness of the spring as it rippled in the shade by the roadside, were native to her, as they were to Steven Randall, who after his wide wanderings found here that dearness of association which is the youth of age.

But for Stephanie, to whom the landscape had no background of passion as abroad, it was all rather flat and uninteresting,—dull even. She missed the towered castles, fortifications, and bugling soldiers looping away in the morning distance. And so May had deepened into June; her mind unoccupied and her heart grown vagrant if not actually disordered. She remembered all the light stirrings of fluttering romance she had dimly known. She recalled men who had been her admirers, who might have been lovers,—and here life was uneventful and long, and from the windows she saw only the repeated meadows and open country. And only

echo sang a siren song of all she had cared for and left behind; gallantry, romance, passion. And though the sun made hay with an unabated fury outside, in her heart the plover was ceaselessly calling for rain, for shadow, for all the mystic tracery of the hidden and subtle to replace this existence of the apparent and impersonal. "Hellas! but it is triste,—triste to waste one's youth here alone!" she confided to her reflection. She clasped her slender waist in her white hands covered with great jewels, as she whispered it. She was slender as a rose. Her dawn-kissed colouring, the exact tinting of her flesh, gave her the hint of one. She found herself musing idly of a man she had met the week before at a dinner at one of the villas on the hills. He had not taken her out to dinner, but watched her fascinated, and came to her the moment he was free. He had been in Europe uninterruptedly for three years and was immediately returning, he told her. They were not strangers. Her first remark had led the way for no ordinary conversation.

"You had not forgotten me?" he challenged. She so understood it at least.

"Not in the least, but you had forgotten me. Yes, men do forget," as he tried to interrupt her with his denial.

"Do men forget? Do they? I wish they did. I have sought but one thing more than to forget!"

She cast her eyes demurely down, but it was very diverting, this meeting.

"You did not have a suspicion of finding me here in this so Puritan village?"

"You in America! You here in perpetual dry dock, no! Unless your *bon Dieu* hears some prayers as persistent and fervent as mine, which have been utterly untiring since our last parting that April day in Paris. I hear the fountains yet—I shall always hear them when I think of you."

"You rode by me at dusk this evening," she said hastily, "I was the other side of the wall surrounding the park at Sky High. I could swear you were reading a woman's letter, or pretending to. A letter written on faint blue paper, abominable colour! Probably scented,—the tint a *femme de chambre* might use for her lover"—she mocked.

"It is true you saw me smiling over a pale blue letter. A child's scribble it was—that of a *petite* of twenty, a veritable baby half awake—"

"But pretty?"

"Pretty of course, and afraid of horses,—*ingénu*, in short."

"I am not jealous."

"I wish you were—if you were—"

"I have no right to be and if I had the right, I should not be,—for rights only imply tedious things," she sighed, half closing her eyes that

sparkled through her lowered lashes. "But in a village, with no opera, no casino, no plage, no affair,—or only such a ghost of a dead one as this, what is an honest woman to do? *Mon Dieu* it was different once, was it not?"

"It was between us, once—" he began.

"You were always a brute!" she smiled alluringly at him, "but at least you did know what love was. I detest blue."

"Was it a brute who all but sacrificed his honour to secure *L'Hirondelle*, the white-footed mare you rode those summer days in *Normandie*, when we were learning the roads of love together? Do men forget! See how! Thou knowest it is not so"—falling unconsciously into the more intimate speech of their past,—“Do men forget! Is it because they forget, that I have kept her with me ever since? I, who was nearly driven mad by thy fascination and then deserted,—promising everything and leaving me without a word! And not alone myself, but also my friend,—for whom I was abandoned,” he added.

"He is well, I hope," she suggested.

"What has happened to him, I never knew. His friends have lost him. He cared no more,—when he was thrown aside with the dead flowers of that summer." He leaned toward her until their shoulders touched.

"Will you ride with me to-morrow at nine?"

Is it not possible to leave this Puritan village at once, and together?" he had gone beyond the pale in his excitement, and the surprise of their encounter. Her answer had driven the pleasure from his face,—“I am leaving myself to-morrow, for a time, and not alone. I am married.”

“Adieu,” he said firmly,—bending to kiss her hand.

“Au revoir, if you choose,” she replied, and in her ears, was the splash of the surf as they had ridden into it on the plage of Normandie. Her heart shook with terror of the resurrection of her pleasure, of her sin, and her madness for this friend he had mentioned, the first lover she had known and measured as her equal in potential passion.

She shook off her retrospection now, turning back to herself in the mirror with mock despair. “Poor darling! To what a fate you are reduced! To be obliged to admire yourself!” she said, as if playing again one of her games of lonely childhood. Under its soft hair always so elaborately dressed, her small head had a little the langour of a heavy flower. Her eyes were indolent oftenest, leaving expression of her passing emotions to those remarkable eyebrows. She was rather exquisite than beautiful. Her slight hips and sloping shoulders suggested a Greek boy and made the delicacy of her femininity more striking. In her loose summer morning gown with its high silken sash, her

light limbs would have beguiled Burne Jones to place her among the maidens of his golden stair. Neither drapery or lace concealed the delicate contour of her perfect figure,—a breast where mischief or indifference or slumbering passion might dispute a lover's possession. Her arms escaping their loose sleeves were warm and waiting — She played her little *comédie* for her own amusement. —“Poor darling! to be obliged to embrace yourself!” but at the moment, the frightened *veerie* flew off her nest with a cry of warning to her mate, and the sound of wheels grated on the gravel. Raleigh had returned unannounced, it seemed. She went toward him, instantly transformed to the woman of the world, his wife, Mrs. Raleigh Payne. He kissed her enthusiastically, patting her between her shoulders after the manner of the great American husband.

“Well, how have you been?” he asked. “What is there to eat, darling? Any breakfast left? I am just in from Denver. Jim ran me over, so I did not wire for a trap.”

CHAPTER IV

RIDING ALONE

RALEIGH PAYNE was not surprised that some one was to be sent to protect America's interests for her outraged Christians. The morning papers were full of it. He read them while the odour of new mown hay came in at the French windows and the veerie called from the shrubbery. The telegram urging him immediately to the summer headquarters of his government was however unlooked for. And at the first blush it was unwelcome. He had rather intimate and fondly matured notions of his own for disposal of this particular summer. He regarded the yellow message with not too much pleasure, though it gave him assurance of his own prominence in the minds of those supreme in power. There was after all a distinct elation in reading the succinctly worded command underlying the civil notification. But there was also that moment of personal regret,—which had in it however no least element of indecision. He was going of course. He had gone mentally,—was already past the preliminary formalities, had received his credentials and instructions and stood again in fancy in the

smoking room of the bizarre hotel he had frequented of old; the one facing the water at Buda Pesth. He had been out to the Balkans several times before, but never on a mission of such direct authority and importance. He finished his coffee with his mind far away. Buda Pesth was before his inward vision,—Buda glittering, audacious, the lair of license and self-made law at the scimiter's blade! Then Belgrade blotted it out—Belgrade the bloody home of assassination; Peter Georgevitch with his boat tied always to the river-washed stairway behind the palace, in case of sudden enmity; tragic plot and bungling slaughter; human beings half savage, regal assumption, pretence and brutal revenge, promises made only for purpose of swifter deception,—in short Macedonia, that arena of religious liberty, for political frenzy, for personal lust and greed for power. He had no illusions concerning that semi-civilised peninsula,—the resource of careerists from the scum of Europe, the grave of patriots; that seething mass whose future is under eclipse of a red sun yet to rise, doomed to barbaric massacre and fanatical mania; their blazing roofs lit by the Turk or his enemy as wanton destruction may dictate; French cooking and oriental human butchery side by side; Manon's farewell, with its last note of erotic Paris played at table d'hôte while the shrieks of women outraged by soldiers in the streets are still un-

silenced. Raleigh Payne knew the risk he ran in answering the summons he held in his hand. He went up to Steven Randall holding it open and walking as a man does whose body and mind are not occupied in the same activity. They plunged at once into every sort of political detail. Randall knew Bulgaria and was keen for following up the exigencies of present conditions and conjecturing the outcome.

"The personal equation has more to do with the chance for peace than most outsiders know, or those inside will admit. A good deal depends on Peter, after all," he said.

"What about the sons? Do they come into the proposition?"

"One is too young, the other a 'farceur,' a degenerate who plays the rôle of young tyrant with sufficient bravado to dazzle some of such subjects as his father's empire consists of. Paris gave him a smattering of the worst kind of knowledge. He is a swaggering, vile-tempered lad, handsome in an effeminate way, who orders, 'heads off all around!' like the Red Queen in Alice in Wonderland."

"No real force of character or leadership?"

"Force could not do it alone, out there," said Raleigh judicially. "It takes magnetism and superstition too."

"What is Ferdinand good for? He and Peter

rather keep the front doors of that region; have the appearance of sovereignty, I mean," Randall discriminated.

"There is no force in any present reign to be relied on, once the military is demoralised. No one's head will be safe long, one way or the other, to my mind." As Raleigh spoke he went to the table where all sorts of maps and charts lay ready for instant service. He selected one of the Balkans, and spread it out between them, as Steven Randall continued, "One plot just as likely to succeed as another. One intrigue tripping up another in the dark, and the end of one party assured by the machinations of the opposing faction. A ruler escapes by falling between armed bandits who are after his throne and fall upon each other by mistake."

"Exactly," nodded Raleigh, "and the murderers are murdered themselves in turn by those who instigated their crime, to cover themselves from suspicion and wash their hands in face of the mob, before attempting to mount the throne. It is a seething bloody mass, a mere disorderly mob out there."

Randall re-read the telegram. His breath quickened. How he would have loved to obey that curt summons! How he thrilled to his old vocation with the thousand comprehending thrills of an old war horse, at the scent of a distant fray!

"When do you go?" was his only question.

"At once I suppose. I judge it is immediate."

"Apparently."

The telegram lay on the table between them. Stephanie had laid a rose there on her way from her own room half an hour earlier. As the two men stood discussing the situation, their eyes were accosted by this mute protest. Neither had taken Stephanie into account, or at least not in so many words.

She stepped in now from the balcony, hesitated, noting their preoccupation, and would have passed on, but that Raleigh handed her the telegram, without comment."

"My eternal rival, business?" she asked sweetly, without a suspicion of the truth. Her heart gave no premonition of what it might mean to her. She read it and gave it back mechanically.

"That is to say—" she began.

"That I am immediately recalled to the diplomatic service," said Raleigh, already on his way to the telephone to telegraph the hour of his departure—

"Beg pardon, Mr. Payne, St. Louis is on the long distance," announced the butler, precipitating his exit.

"What does it mean, Grandee?" Stephanie asked, turning to him with the fond soubriquet she had chosen for him in place of the stupid word

"Uncle," she could never bring herself to call him. "Is it anything of importance?"

"Possibly,—that depends," said Randall, his thoughts still far away on that troubled peninsular and the course of probable event.

"Is it business or diplomacy?" she asked again. And in her low voice there was that reminiscent intonation of her convent training.

"Diplomacy, with a chance for a good deal of both, perhaps. It works both ways often when it works out in the end." Her cheeks flushed eagerly.

"Abroad? O tell me, Grandee, please, is it abroad?" she begged, forgetful of him as her host, in her painful excitement.

"The Balkans," he said briefly.

"And he is going? Surely he is going? Surely he would not refuse?" she started after Raleigh as if to prevent it.

"Of course he is going. Did you ever know Raleigh lose a chance to ride on the front seat, no matter if it was his own funeral,—no matter what it cost him or anybody else?"

"*Coûte que coûte*, he must not refuse!" she said firmly. "I will accompany him as far as Vienna and there await his return, or even at Buda, as he may wish." It was bravado, the last half of her announcement. She knew she would not be permitted to set one of her high heels over the Aus-

trian frontier. She had heard and understood too much discussion of the affairs of the desperate Balkans, had too often seen the men, from every quarter of Europe, excitedly drawing maps of Servia and Bulgaria with their silver forks upon the damask cloth of state dinner tables; — forgetful for the moment of all but political significance and geographical importance. She knew Raleigh would never dream of taking her out with him. But while he manipulated his country's affairs and angled for his own diplomatic prizes, she should again be restored to the world she loved and for which she pined. She should again see and hear and breathe! It would mean for her a coming to life after the dull inertia of a long season in this "so Puritan" retreat. She left the room as a sunbeam withdraws, — swiftly, silently; leaving grey-ness behind her to emphasise her absence. Steven Randall remained looking after her as if he saw her still, and not only saw her but her relation to the event of the morning. His face clouded as he realised her inevitable disappointment. Raleigh would never hamper himself with the care of a frail and precious object like this, when the game of diplomacy was to be played at a moment's notice. Kipling's couplet expressed Raleigh's sentiment perfectly —

"Down to Gehenna or up to the throne
He rides fastest who rides alone."

In which direction was his nephew riding? That he would reach his appointed destination he never doubted. He sometimes wondered, as he sat there alone save for his books and his thoughts, if it would compensate the boy for all he had let go and lost and been unaware of on his spectacular ride toward his self-set goal. He admired Raleigh's quality profoundly. He could not help seeing that it lacked a certain sacredness, a generosity of being that included the welfare of others. And he feared the effect of a change he had dimly perceived of late in Raleigh, which he could only define to himself as a tolerance of compromise. This he felt to be an open door to lower standards, both of personal behaviour and public morality. When Raleigh came back, he broke into another side of the situation without preamble.

"You will leave Stephanie with me, I hope?"

"That is what I came back up stairs to say. That is, if it does not inconvenience you, sir?"

"I should miss her sadly," Grandee said assuringly, "but I am ashamed to be glad that she must be left behind. She will suffer to our gain,—after the habit of women."

"She won't mind, after the first blow. She is perfectly happy here. She is devoted to you, and she has Christine and the babies to keep her content," Raleigh enumerated glibly.

"I dread to see her unhappy," said Randall, pay-

ing no attention to him, "I dread also the consequence of a solitude prolonged against her will."

"Blood will tell," Raleigh said with confidence.

"Yes, I know. And will hers bear re-telling?"

It was the only sharp thing his nephew had ever heard him say in regard to his marriage. He had made up his mind to say a few harsh truths to Raleigh before he let him go, for Stephanie's sake. Ambition was all very well, it was natural, as were many other of the meaner, baser traits men had to stamp out under their own heel.

"You owe something beside fame and a name, to this soul you have taken for your own and deprived of all its natural supports and satisfactions," he reminded his nephew. "How long can a woman, especially a woman like Stephanie, be expected reasonably, to live on vicarious fame?" He smiled at the absurdity of the notion.

"Do you mean that I am neglecting Stephanie, when I obey the call of my profession?"

"The consequences of neglect may be the same, whatever the cause."

"I am sure Stephanie has never thought of it in such a light. She has been instrumental in countless glittering conclusions that went as we wanted them to go. She plays her part as consciously as any accredited diplomat, always under the shadow of my influence and shielded from the lightest breath of scandal. Since our first warning in

Rome, soon after our marriage, when I was so shortsighted as to let her come within an ace of a breakdown, we have been entirely united in our plans. We have played our game to win, and played it together. I have played fair and I could stake my life she has, and will. We have denied ourselves the ordinary joys of less complicated and ambitious young people perhaps, but we have been in harmony always. Stephanie adores place and power and she shall always have it increasingly, if I am spared to get it for her!"

"I hate to turn pragmatist and meddle with matters above and beyond me, Raleigh," was the unconvinced reply, "but I think the time has come to treat Stephanie less as a diplomatic asset and more as your wedded wife. I believe if you starve the woman in her indefinitely, it will find its natural appeal answered in some less brilliant but more normal agent of the devil, or the Almighty, according to the way Nature happens to see it."

"Mr. Payne, the communication is established with Chicago, and Central would like you to use it as soon as convenient," said the butler reappearing. It was always this same old story when Mr. Payne was in the house. Sky High called it Pandemonium, in comparison with its common calm.

Stephanie had waited for Raleigh to be done at the telephone. He had in fact but laid the re-

ceiver down when she delivered her ultimatum and congratulations in one breath.

"Grandee has told me. I am enchanted. Of course you are going. How I am glad and proud! When do we start?"

Her face was illuminated by the sudden joy of deliverance. Raleigh dropped the pen he held. The calculation he had begun was broken by her interruption. On the desk before him a map of the Balkans was propped up, over which his regular red and black dots represented vital realities to him.

"I have no instructions yet," he said evasively, taking her outstretched hand in both his own. "I shall go to New York to-night and wire from there."

"When ought we to sail?" she asked, assuming her part in his arrangements.

"Look up the week's sailings, there's a darling," he said, tossing her the morning paper. "Find a quick boat, a Lloyd probably, for Bremen. There ought to be one on Tuesday."

He turned back to his letter, writing deliberately as if weighing his words.

Her heart beat to suffocation. She suddenly remembered Lazarus. There was a stained glass window embodying his legend, that had been familiar to her in a chapel at Vienna. This was what he felt then, when his Lord suddenly called

him to come forth from his tomb. Her breath cramped her breast for the wild joy of this return to life and the living.

"Tuesday," she read out to Raleigh, without a hint of her inward storm.

"Tuesday? Which boat is it?"

She told him; with a flurry of soft arms about his shoulders and a red mouth close to his own.

"Let me go down with you to-night!" she begged. "You have only been with me one day, and before that only a few hours, since I can remember. I have been here for ever, since April, alone, almost all the time alone. I am devoted, sincerely, to Grandee, and I have not been too unhappy here, but it is always alone and I am not one of those great souls born for solitude. I am nothing but a woman, good for nothing but to love and live to be loved. I suffocate for pleasure, for the excitement of love and the world, for love itself, for you and your love, which is mine by right as well as by treaty!" Again she invited his kiss with those near lips.

"You have that always, you know," he said warmly, patting her hand.

"You say so," she repeated, unfaith in her words.

"Then what more do you want? You must not be silly, darling!"

"I do not want to 'know it,' for granted. I

want you to make me feel it, here — ” she touched her heart, then his lips, with a light caress of her frail fingers. He attempted to draw her to him but she withdrew and stood with her proud little head thrown back, every beauty of face and figure full in his face, as she flung her love challenge at him, “if you do not love me, some one else will be obliged to. I am made only for love. I cannot live without love.”

He would not admit he was startled, but Grandee's warning came back most unpleasantly as he heard her.

“Everybody here at Sky High loves you, as it is,” he retorted. “You are my little Queen of Hearts. Christine is your wondering first Lady in Waiting, and Grandee, though himself a crowned head, your humblest subject. Even Joel Underwood, who soured on everyone in his youth, has an uncankered endurance of you as you walk through his flower-beds, that he gives only to his tallest hollyhocks when he has cheated the blight of their perfection! Even that newest baby, James Trent, Jr., prefers you to his mother.”

Stephanie did not smile. “You may think you love me,” she said seriously, “perhaps you do, but it is an American invention, this love of yours; a long distance connection after the manner of your telephones. You have installed it, and you expect it to remain in service unless the lightning strikes

it and it burns out. Then you make another installation and think no more about it. I do not comprehend such emotions."

Impulsively she threw herself upon his breast. "Put your arms about me, listen to my heart, Raleigh, am I a thing of steel? Am I a triumph of machinery? You know it is not so. Confess I am made for sweeter satisfaction!"

"But a man cannot be always at his Lady's side, darling. He has to be out in the world fighting for her fame," Raleigh opposed, parrying the issue. "Grandee would be distressed to know you had bored yourself here with him. There is really quite a variety one can make. Have you driven about?"

She gently disengaged herself. "Do you like to drive about, Raleigh?" she asked, in turn, "to drive about, up and down on these hot country roads, with never the diversion of a Casino, or a boulevard where one sees others driving? Where one never stops for tea or music, and never a sigh of wind from the sea to make one refreshed?"

"But there are always the hills and their changing shadows"—he began.

"So Christine finds," she cut him short, "and Christine also is content here. She talks of Mr. Trent, who is never beside her, as if he was an enterprise in which her fortune was risked. If his business keeps him from her all summer, it is to her

apparently the same thing,— the accepted and ordinary course of affairs with your married people in America. Bah! It is policy, business, what you will,— but it is not love!” she snapped her fingers like a gamin. Her great rings flashed with imprecation.

“I thought you cared as greatly as I for the game we are playing together,” he justified himself by reminding her.

“Together, yes. Let me play also, give me my part in the game, and I can forget my instincts, but leave me as I have been, these many months, and I will promise you nothing. Non, merci!”

Steven Randall talked the problem out with Raleigh later in the day and failed. Raleigh saw only obstacles confronting every suggestion he made, even the proposition to go along himself, and look after Stephanie in the enforced intervals of absence over the frontier of civilisation. In the end it was Stephanie who won her own cause. Finesse and coquetry and the wiles of the eternal feminine turned the scale. In one of her overwhelming moods of passion he could not resist her. Her unique charm asserted itself over him to his undoing, moved him beyond calculation or control. She was actuated not by love of him, but by her instinct to arouse his need of her. She knew the one sure way to disarm him. When she had kept him over his train and he had lost his first chance,

she knew that she had won. The delay really made very small difference if he was to sail on Tuesday, but small as the concession was to his weakness for his wife, it shamed him to admit he had made it. Stephanie was radiant, lit by an inward fire. Let him be a politician in a thousand, and a diplomat in a hundred thousand, her blandishments unmanned him for an oblivious moment, as Helen and Cleopatra and all the nameless insuperable host have prevailed since Venus and Mars began their unequal struggle.

He left her next morning ashamed of his temporary surrender, yet filled to the lips with the sense of her. And she, triumphant in her power over him, knew she had sold herself for a price,—and that price escape. The irregular blood in her veins had instructed her not in vain. She had given all that she had for her life, with all that life meant to her, and what man or woman but will do the same?

A message from Raleigh stating that he should be unable to return but must remain where he was until Monday, keyed her nerves to the breaking point. She waited, conscious of every hour, trying to throw herself into her packing, and to silence the growing misgiving of her heart. In spite of her actual preparations she could not make the truth seem true. She could not visualise herself either on her journey down to town, or walking up

the gang-plank at Raleigh's side, nor in any of the ensuing attitudes of the voyage or their arrival on the other side. On Monday afternoon, when she was feverish with suspense, a second message came; not with the news of his arrival to fetch her, or the directions for her joining him, but a mere statement of his own sailing the next morning. He had added one curt word,—“unavoidable” as if in explanation of his strange desertion.

She was beside herself with anger as she read it. His brief letter, sent back by pilot boat was hardly anything more in extenuation of his offense. She read it without a tear.

“Lâche,” she whispered between her white lips. The word burnt her in passing them. Steven Randall saw her take it and remembered men he had seen take a bullet. He dared not speak to her. He suffered too acutely for her disappointment in her life, and in Raleigh.

“And I—am married to this man!” she said, speaking very low. “I, an Austrian by birth and title!”

The regret on the face of the man before her checked the other sentence all but out,—“I am imprisoned in this Puritan fortress without hope of succour!—While he is free!” She kept it back for Grandee's sake, only adding, “He did not dare to tell me. Coward!”

“He promised to come back for me,—and here,

read it—he promises to return to me from Europe all the sooner, for sake of this sailing in secret. He even dared to write words of love to me, after he had intentionally deceived me. How I despise him!” There was a luxury of contempt in her voice that never once lifted from its low level.

“Be just to him. He suffered in this as well as you, dear Stephanie,” Randall said tenderly. “Raleigh loves you more than anyone in the world. I am sure of it. I was with him when he first saw you and swore he would marry you. He threw over another girl to do it, and waited years, until you had become sufficiently a woman.”

“What sort of a person was that other woman?”

“Christine’s sort. Christine herself if you like. I supposed Raleigh had told you.”

“What an idiot he was!” she exclaimed. “She was made expressively to his own order!”

“He fell in love with you. Nothing else mattered to him after that,” Grandee persisted.

“He was afraid to tell me,—afraid of a woman! Miserable!” she reiterated, clenching her small hands.

“You must not forget all his splendid traits because he has failed you in one respect,” he urged.

“I have only contempt for him now. If he had abused me or abandoned me, I could have forgiven it or understood it, par exemple,—the training of

a woman abroad would assist me to understand, but to be a coward!" She shrugged. She felt herself suddenly lowered with him, as his property, to an abyss of degradation to which her father, the spy, had never plunged her.

"He is deeply in love with you, dear," poor Grandee maintained. It was the best he could think of to offer her. "I have a letter from him too, full of concern for your happiness here, and going into detail of his instructions more fully. He has ordered you a consolation ring, that ought to be sent up to-morrow. His every thought is for you. He is absolutely in love with you"—

"He is in love with himself. Undoubtedly he admires his devotion in this last act, most profoundly!" Steven Randall winced under her insight. He did not altogether admire his brilliant nephew or his increasing fame, at the moment.

"He promised"—was all she would say. She continued unrelenting. "It is one thing to deceive an empire in diplomacy, and another to deceive a woman who trusts you. It was an affair of honor between us." How could Grandee hope to extenuate the breach of good faith, which he so perfectly saw and condemned?

"Raleigh may have considered yours a diplomatic pledge only,—open to ratification by treaty," he ventured as a last suggestion.

"It is entirely another thing to cheat an empire

in diplomacy, when your opponents are playing the same game, with the cards spread openly between you. But it is like cheating at cards privately to deceive a woman in good faith. Possibly a democracy has no code like our noblesse oblige of Europe," she concluded shrewdly. And with this he quit the argument, for he knew that she was right. And it is only a woman who takes much satisfaction in arguing a point when she knows she is worsted, and in the wrong, for the sheer pleasure of testing her own eloquence. From that day Stephanie never spoke of her husband if it was avoidable. He had placed her in Grandee's care by virtue of several closely written pages of explanation and expansion of his own plans. He trusted his uncle to keep her from fretting too much over the inevitable, expressed his regret at taking French-leave of them, thanked him in advance for all his hospitality and protection, and then passed eagerly to phases of the Eastern situation, and the part in it he was cast to play. Everything was taken easily for granted, and externally all went on as before. To Stephanie nothing brought relief for white nights and restless days, until the Imitation of the sacred À Kempis came to her rescue, with its overwhelming balm for the wounded, that in her convent experience she would have believed inconceivable.

CHAPTER V

THE MESSENGER OF BELGRADE

WHILE the heat crept higher and higher at Sky High, and every day burned a deeper coat of brown on grass beyond the lawns where Joel Underwood played his hose in the shadow, and snarled at the stupidity of those who watered in the sun,—“pouring tea kettles on their green,”—Raleigh Payne was each day nearer a new opportunity for the aggrandisement of his own reputation. He had hated to leave Stephanie. But the haste of his bidding was an exigence in itself and the thought of leaving her at Buda Pesth or even Vienna not to be considered. He had fled the charm he feared might swerve him from his course, somewhat sobered by the astonishing power she had over him, and more deeply in love than he had time to realise. There was bound to be much in the life he had chosen, not as he might have preferred it. He accepted this, so must Stephanie, having accepted him. He dismissed compunction from his regret and further consideration accordingly.

His striking figure, and handsome face, with its open offer of friendship to any who might care

for it, made him easily a social mark upon the voyage, though he saved many hours of each day for the books and pamphlets he had brought with him, hastily snatched up on leaving to supplement his own intuition and information concerning the situation he was going out to meet. And though nothing distinguished him on deck from any summer pleasure-seeker, he talked late at night in the empty smoking room with a couple of men whose knowledge of the Danube territories far exceeded his own,—one of them a merchant from Moscow, and the other a Hungarian musician in the second cabin. All of which was without a breath as to his own destination, of course. No one but the young German Count wore shoes so immaculately white, or yachting costume more carelessly correct. There was no hint of business, none of the nervous alertness or forced indifference supposed to characterise the war correspondent, in the easy leisure of this idler. He was on terms of cordiality with the Captain and crew from previous voyages, and his daily round of visits paid beside the steamer chairs of his old and new acquaintance had the charm of a man of society, who is happy to pass his own time by killing yours for you,—without committing himself to any particular views of life, or localised reminiscence, involving personalities. He always seemed to know when he had made a pretty girl sufficiently re-

marked by his little attentions, and when to rise regretfully to give his place to a Second Officer enviously near and obviously drawn by his competition. The mothers smiled on him, and recounted scandal to him; scandal so old as to have been trustworthily proven in the courts, or so new as to be not improbable however surprising. It was likely to be useful later to this man who never forgot a relation between any two human beings, since it might establish a missing motive, identity or connection. Tall and commanding in bearing, with the smooth shaven jaw that bespoke force of will, and grey eyes that were sometimes blue and transparent as those of a child, Raleigh with his high cheek bones and rather florid colouring, looked more like the portrait of his Virginia great-grandfather than like himself. His hair was chestnut, but so dark that he had escaped the usual jibes at the temper popularly associated with red. When he was angry his mouth had an ugly way of closing that accompanied a drawing of heavy eyebrows and knitting of brow, making him at once ten years older than he was. At such times the grey eyes so full of wit, and sarcasm that caused others to shrink, could narrow to a hateful expression of positive aversion. It was said by those who disliked him, or opposed him and incurred his dislike, that he never stumbled over his principles in making for his own ends. But one

felt, at sight of him, that his breeding would save him from any outward failure in morals or fine taste. He might do a thing cunning to actual untruth, but he would never commit a blunder due to sins of the flesh, or be caught in a discredit to his Southern honour. It would be done in a corner, if it had to be done. He would never sin openly, from principle or passion. Impulse was no vice of his. Other men found his sympathies hard to enlist but his interest unflagging. The patience, which was really the genius of his career, endured under the minor strain of social boredom as magnificently as his dogged waiting for a government to fall, or the signing of a ticklish treaty. He played bridge as astutely with Mrs. Truxton-Coming of Boston, who was at loss for an exclusive fourth at the table in her cabin de luxe every afternoon, as he studied his map of Turkey and Macedonia. His little red dots travelling down the Danube from Buda to Belgrade, and then off sideways on crowding trails of their own, looked now like nothing but processions of Albanian bandits, winding their way over those haggard hills at nightfall. As far as Buda the trip was entirely as he had foreseen. There he expected to find cables. But there was nothing awaiting him at the Hungarian Palace hotel save a word from Steven Randall, code of course, signifying "all well" and "good luck to the enterprise." On reading it he

felt again his perfidy to Stephanie, with disagreeable vividness. He dismissed its effect upon him, by promising himself to go back via Paris and pick up such finery as would make everything all right: — some new frocks, jewelry of course. He knew her taste and had often helped her own selection. His eagerness to be at work received a serious check at Belgrade. Here he found a cable from headquarters bidding him await letters of instruction.

By quickest calculation it meant ten days, yet if he took advantage of that probability to go off at some tangent of his own, a contrary cable might come and miss him. A delay in execution was not to be thought of. So down he sat, like nothing but a cat by a hole where a fascinating tail has disappeared; inactive but incapable of diversion. Just as across the river the Austrian fortress watched Belgrade with permanent suspicion. The hotel was none too clean and the kitchen none too palatable. He waited, marking time as best he could, and the heat made even the game of solitaire too much of an effort, though he cheated to make brilliant runs that ought to have kept him awake. Through a newspaper man, just en route from Sophia to Caracas to cover the French-African situation, he got a permit to go through the palace of the luckless Draga and her infatuated King. He even amused himself by putting his

fingers on actual faded blood spots and conjecturing the deadly onslaught up the dark staircase to the royal chamber,—until his own blood refused to congeal satisfactorily, and his spinal column no longer curdled over the amassing of ghastly horrors told off by the guide, gladly exploiting his country's shame for a handful of cheap coin. Aside from the European newspapers there was, after the fourth day, no external resource left him but to talk with the people about their recent history and future hopes of freedom. Happily the Concierge spoke German, and was delighted to repeat the scandals he had overheard. He repeated the common talk of the town, how Draga and her sisters had lived together in questionable luxury, before she had inveigled the boy into her toils; being herself an old coquette with a reputation no lie could whitewash, though others pronounced her a virtuous woman, ruined by her own ambitions and hard fate. He enlarged upon her extravagance, which had emptied the treasuries of all Servia, her toilets being the talk of the Balkans. He explained how she had led the poor infatuated boy monarch by the nose, until the sight of the stupid husband and the designing wife, stirred her counsellors to rise and protect him,—and how those he trusted most betrayed him at last, through hatred of the alien woman who had undone him in their eyes, and left him no longer a ruler fit to

reign but a besotted fool, squandering his kingdom for lust of a woman openly unfaithful to him or to them. There were all sides of the murder to hear, from all sorts of sources. The air was full of cries. Revolutionists shrieked oppression, sympathisers of assassination applauded. Law and order, backed by Europe and the balance of power, spoke in would-be authoritative tones, while Russia as firmly as lay in her power holding the throne for Peter Georgevitch, her step-son, acted as intermediary pro tem.

It was not much to the point, as far as Raleigh's affairs were concerned. His way lay southward toward Constantinople. Bulgaria was more on his cards than Servia. He listened because he had nothing else to do, but he chafed desperately, when, on the ninth day after his arrival, no instructions had appeared. The French war correspondent had told many marvellous tales and gone. He was left to the isolation of the natives, who though overpaid and promptly, had begun to look curiously and wag idle tongues over his delay. This was reflected in the manner of those about him until it became annoying. Twice the manager of the hotel had personally enquired of him his proposed route. If he came to them from the East, or from Europe? If his health was entirely satisfactory?

Raleigh replied that it was, with thanks for the courtesy, and wondered if they were much in the

habit of poisoning people, in their line of trade. He was not nervous, but he was sick of the situation beyond all endurance. He was alone,—no, let that be unsaid, for already there sat down with him at table, and strolled with him through the bazar, and never left him, an unseen figure, always veiled, always in disguise,—Suspicion. The officials in the streets saw the ghost, so did the servants indoors, who stopped speaking when he entered, to stare after him. But though the breath of the spectre sometimes crossed his eyes, it was gone as it came, and he alone knew not that he was haunted.

He could not always be writing letters or studying pamphlets. It was too hot to prowl much in the sun, and not safe at nightfall for an unknown stranger. He was too keen on his mission to lose himself in literary work, as he surely could have under saner circumstances. At last he had unbroken time at his disposal, but he was unable to think of anything he cared to say. In short, he knew he was waiting. "Waiting like a house a'fire," he wrote Steven Randall. Waiting, so hard he could do nothing else but fume! In vain he tried his hand on the lyrics he contributed at intervals to the best magazines. They at least proved his all-round talent and emphasised him as a man of varied gifts, if he had not won the recognition he wanted. He was established as a poet to be ac-

cepted. His friends spoke to him of this or that poem they had happened to see, usually forgetting if it was a Sapphic or a sonnet, and confusing which periodical had it, or the title with one by somebody else in the same number. He was rather distant now, when approached about his one volume of Lyrics, published just before his marriage. He could not bear to be mediocre in anything. He loved literature as men often love the buried part of themselves. And the guarded commendation of those who knew best, together with the ill-advised congratulations of those who knew not at all, were more trying to his self-esteem than the tepid reviews of the press at large. Several good publications gave him respectful notices, discriminatingly recalling to their public his distinguished diplomatic career. Raleigh had made up his mind that the next volume should be an advance so startling, that the poet and diplomat should henceforth be reckoned side by side. And behold, here was his chance for all sorts of local colour, and he could not get into the rhythmic swing or catch the verbal tune of savagery all about him. He could not think of a rhyme for wheelbarrow,—unless it was to-morrow!

On the night of the tenth day he overheard protracted conversation outside his door. It seemed to be the Manager and Concierge slightly at odds. He could not understand the nature of their curses

or the drift of their difference. But it was explicit in intimation that one insisted, and the other opposed. Argument followed, then scorn, then appeal. While he was sitting, distracted from his poetical efforts by their voices, there came a sharp knocking at his own door. On opening it, there stood before him as he had surmised, the Manager and the Concierge. It was the Manager who spoke.

"If you please, Monsieur is of the English race? And has recently come from Vienna. Yes? Not the infected interior?" he asked, civilly enough.

"Yes, absolutely. Why?" Raleigh said, with dislike of the impertinence, if it proved one.

"Very good! And M'sieur has the intention to proceed at once? The affair of M'sieur being unhappily so urgent in its nature we may not hope to keep him with us longer? Yes?" he repeated, regardless of the counter-question.

"Perhaps," said Raleigh and again, "Why?"

"The nature of the affair of M'sieur requires it of him to be prudent,—absolutely sage," said the Manager. This time it was an assertion made with authority, almost threatening.

"Much as we should regret to hurry M'sieur"—he began, when the Concierge stepped into the room.

"There is a man dying, in that chamber," he said in German. "He is mad to have a word with

the English-speaking gentleman. He heard your voice speaking with me in the corridor, and begs of the respectfully honoured Highly-born to enter with me his apartment, if for only an eye-wink."

"Do not listen! Do not go," warned the Manager at once, comprehending as if by intuition.

"Is it not enough for the carrion to feed on one dead body in this house? One sees that M'sieur must not be allowed to expose himself. M'sieur is of so distinguished a reputation! It makes less of inquiry afterward for all. It is better, certainly, if M'sieur were to leave us quietly to-morrow morning, or even, if his affairs are more important, to-night,—to our own natural regret."

"What is the sick man's name?" Raleigh asked curtly.

"As if one could say!" scoffed the Manager.

"What is his nationality, then?"

"In the register he calls himself Denbeigh. One doubts if a priest assisted at that christening! He is one of a thousand denationalised robbers that pass and re-pass ever between Belgrade and the East, leaving trouble behind. Sophia, Bulgaria, every metre of the way to Plevna, is full of spies, M'sieur. Russian, Austrian, Turkish, Hungarian, even German and English. No man is according to his own statement of himself. No man shows his passport unless he is forced to do it to

save his skin. No man but trembles when another suddenly enters at the door of the café. They know who they are, and often who the others are they fear, but we do not, we who become responsible for them to the police!"

"Well, to begin with, my name is straight. I am nothing but Raleigh Payne, taking a journey into the East and waiting for my mail from America." He smiled his disarming ingenuous smile, at that, which would have reassured any one west of Asia. "I am not plotting for Peter's crown or poisoning myself to give your hotel a bad name," he added, "and if that poor chap wants to see a man from home, I am not going to be put out until I have seen him, and that the sooner the better."

"Even so!" the Concierge broke in, "Raleigh Payne, Raleigh Payne! I must see him. Allah sent for him of all others. He repeated it with an intelligence. But I was afraid to bring trouble by doing his commission to the Highly-born, without the consent of the Manager."

"Knew my name, did he? What was his message, if you can remember?"

"Say to Raleigh Payne, a gentleman unable to call upon him, begs the honour of a visit. He is in haste, as he is under orders and the Black General cannot wait for him much longer"—

But already Raleigh was down the hall and

opening the door of the dying stranger. "Newspaper man, I bet a hat!" he said to himself, "dying game in this hole, with his pockets burning with inside information probably. But oh the divine luck of it for me!"

On the narrow bed before him lay a slight figure, round which the sheet clung pathetically, after constant tossing from side to side for the repose that would not be found. The face that turned at the opening of the door was haggard but very winning, unkempt as it was from illness and helplessness and utter lack of care.

"Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Payne, and excuse my not rising please," he said, with a pitiful attempt at bravado. "I am about at the end, you see."

"Knocked yourself out a bit?" Raleigh replied, taking the blistering hot hand in his own cool one.

"Yes, fever, but the fire is about out now. I had a silly notion to see a real face and of course I knew your name." Raleigh bowed his acknowledgments and then scanned the sufferer's features. They baffled him, so he went on with the same lightness of touch—

"Not much beautiful blue Danube about this for either of us, I should judge!"

"Rather not!" cried the sick man with an English accent. "If I had held out till I got up to Buda I might have had a chance, but I am ecrasé,

fini! and my mind winds like the steps to the Saint Mathais kirche from the effort of imagining myself back in sight of that cool white castle set in its shade trees that keep the light out, or strolling along the Franz Joseph Quai, again!"

The two men looked at each other.

"Finished what you went out to do?" Raleigh asked without preamble.

"Yes, and myself too. It's a mean quarter, out there," he added quickly. "No one plays by the rule of any game but his own."

"It is political outlawery," Raleigh assented.

"The peninsula is full of desperate men on queer errands, Russia in the lead," admitted the stranger.

"She is always true to her first love, the Golden Horn."

"The Black Sea provinces are her concern in the present mix-up. Every road leads to tide-water with her. The Bosphorus is her road out —"

Again they searched each other's faces for recognition or for assurance, then the sick man asked in turn, "What are you out after?"

"Protection of our Americanised Christians, mainly." His questioner smiled vaguely. "They are all mad for dominion. Creed does not stand in the way. That is only a government bluff of course."

"I don't know about that. When we see the

desire of liberty springing up like an innocent flower to be crushed by the heel of Turkish armies, it appeals to the free-born American —”

“Or the rapacity of the powers. They are all in it,” declared the other. “And under all their whining about the Jew and the Christian, they care for nothing but their own aggrandisement. Russia dreams of tide-water, no matter how fast asleep she seems. Hungary is a despot by nature. Austria is jealous for the rights of Herzegovina and Bosnia. If America is disinterested, or in the game for religion’s sake, she is the hottest fanatic and the only Samaritan on the peninsula to-day!” They were both temporising. Both knew it perfectly. Neither was saying anything not already known to the other.

“What is the outcome to be, do you think?” Raleigh asked, trying to decide if this fever-stricken chap was English or mongrel,—a newspaper man or in some government’s secret service.

“One hears everything predicted,” was the evasive reply.

“There are rumours of England being called in” —ventured Raleigh, trying him with a bit of real bait,—a notion of his own.

“England could do it!” exclaimed the sick man with admiration, and would have said more but that a sudden weakness overcame him and he dropped flat on his mattress, with the face of a

drowning man. When the seizure had passed a little, after a stiff stimulant by hypodermic, he began to speak rapidly as if in a hurry to have done.

"Never mind all that please, we both know our Balkans, I dare say. Raleigh Payne has a reputation for knowing the job he undertakes,—the English War office so understand it anyway,—and I have some trifling notion of it too. But that is not why I asked your humanity in coming in here to-night. It is just this. I am going to die here,—as soon as I can,—since it is no use delaying, and but for your turning up, there is no one here who knows me, or would take the trouble to pick me up and ship me to any other address. There is money enough and an unused letter of credit beside, but these dogs will never use it for the peace of my soul, not they! They are hurrying me already. It is a nasty bore I know, but we are all sent to bed in the dark alone some time, and I am trusting your being so grateful Allah has spared you this luck of mine, that you will not refuse me."

"There can be no question of that," Raleigh said solemnly. "But are you sure it is hopeless with a man standing by to help?"

"Absolutely. And I am not too much cut up over it either, to say the truth. I did my errand and received my decoration and double pay. I

have no one to fret about me and no woman now to put a bow in her hair to welcome what was Nicolai home again feet first!"

"There was one, then?" the question was very gently put.

"I loved a girl once, but she was not for me. Her guardians notified her government which, on information, took my suit in hand and suppressed me, forcing me into one infected zone after another, with pledges that were broken before they were offered. There is always a woman behind the men who do stunts like mine. There is nothing else bad enough or good enough, heaven to win and hell to lose! so to speak."

"What became of this one?"

"Married."

Raleigh drew his eyebrows together angrily.

"That is not by way of saying she loved," suggested the man on the bed. "She was mine heart and soul, but you know what the damnable double dealing of artificial marriage contracts and court tradition are, and lead a woman into? Netted like birds, all of them! Then, Hoch Adultère! Or a barren life without the love women are created for!"

"But Raleigh was carefully setting his memory at work on the name Nicolai, and piecing together the disconnected fragments of a puzzle that he was sure ought to make a picture,—a man's face and

reputation. There was satisfaction on his relaxing lips now as he leaned eagerly toward the stranger—

“Nicolai, you said? And surely Nicholas Heathleagh! You see I know you even better than you knew me.”

“Guilty,” and their hands gripped in token of mutual dangers shared.

“My dear boy, I have heard about it and you have covered yourself with glory. I am proud to have the chance to take your hand and boast of it afterward,—and prouder still to serve you.”

The eyes of Heathleagh glowed dangerously. “I am on the register ‘in cog.,’” he cautioned lowering his voice. “I could not resist the desire to see you and have it out before I went along.”

“I should say not!” Raleigh sat down on the edge of the bed. “Tell me everything. I am on the way out there now.”

“Then take my advice and go back!” Heathleagh warned gravely. “It is not worth it to you. You serve a democracy. What rules to-day may crumble to-morrow. Patriotism will, too probably, be your only reward. It is too much hell to face out there now, except for an Empire entrenched in one man power,—that never sleeps or fails to reward what has served successfully,—not for that service, but because it may serve again! Are you married?”

Raleigh nodded an affirmative.

"In love?"

"With nothing so much as my wife but my profession."

"Then go back before you are where I am. Listen, I have no time to lose," and he plunged into his story he had feared must die with him unheard from his own lips or only garbled by men who half knew the truth. "You have been puzzled, like all the rest, by my name. My mother was Russian, my father English, who, while temporarily disaffected with his government party, deeply involved himself in the affairs of his Majesty the Tsar. He knew how to be useful to both governments in turn — no need to enlarge, comment unnecessary, — and the imperial favor was unfailing. I will skip all that. It happened that when I came along, he was already dead, and my mother preferred to return to her own country. So I was bred up like a subject, except for a few years in England to acquire the language and politics of my father's race. I came out of it a sort of hybrid soldier of fortune, equipped for diplomacy, and keen for all sorts and shades of performances that required English phlegm and the red blood of Holy Russia. My double qualifications were quickly appreciated. My first errand for His Majesty was one of secret information calling for tact, imagination and daring. The result was satisfactory and my future as-

sured, but on a basis of the unrecognised and irregular, as I at the time failed utterly to comprehend. I never held an openly authorised post, military or diplomatic. I was ostensibly attached to the leading news journal of Petersburg. Under this cover I reaped a brilliant harvest of success far and wide, and was too much intoxicated by my personal importance to care for the real degradation from an established position. I have been everywhere, seen everything inside and out, disguised as every sort of native, speaking every sort of language, yet to the world I am only a lucky correspondent, who always falls on his feet when there is a fray to report. I might have written some real copy out it all, if I had not this engagement with Charon obtruding itself at my elbow! After the woman I spoke of turned her back on me, I naturally went in deeper. Nothing was desperate enough for me then. It suited the War Office and nothing made any difference with me,—except to kill her husband if I got the chance. I knew he was nothing to her but a name. She had queer blood in her veins, hot as Hungary, but an aristocrat on one side by birth. One of those crooked things made to look straight on the outside. Europe is full of them. In the beginning we swore to dupe them all, to continue our intimacy in the face of whatever arrived to us in consequence,—we belonged to each other, and we laughed at fate.

Then I was dispatched to the Transvaal, and my recall changed to a more remote region even, and so on until I swore I would break loose forever unless I was allowed to come back. And she had disappeared, not a word, not a sign left for me.

“The doors of the old palace were shut in my face. I would not bribe servants, for pride. We had no friends in common. She was above me in rank, I told you. Then came the imperial demand for some one to interview Serafoff in his fastness. They tried it, one after another, officer after officer crazy for preferment. Officer after officer got the place but they never reported and no one, unless perhaps the crows, knew where they laid down. I heard of it and asked permission to go. Nobody disputed my right. I set off with a small escort of horsemen all disguised as Turks, to settle the location of certain disputed forts, to learn the roads, and what rivers had bridges,—in case of Russian travellers coming after me; and intending ultimately to reach the Chief of the Insurgents and deliver the verbal message of the Tsar, which he was ready to make good, though not to entrust to paper.”

He paused, too exhausted to continue, and Raleigh scarcely breathed. After a little he went on more rapidly,—“I left them, and in my Turkish costume, made the last day’s journey on foot and alone, effecting my meeting with the man who was

setting all Christendom at nought. I had barely rejoined my escort, and set out to retrace our journey, when my field glasses showed me horsemen, Turkish cavalry on second sight, coming down on us at a run. I rolled my maps as tightly as I could, crowded them into the blouse of my bravest man, and bade them all fly! I counted the minutes it would take them, after emerging from the shelter of the undergrowth, to cross the rolling country beyond, in full view, before the wooded hillsides again gave them cover. On came the deadly Turkish cavalry at a mad pace. I waited, always calculating the seconds that must elapse to insure the safety of my work and my posthumous reputation. The armed band of friendly insurrectionists was not far away, but would my men find it? Or would they meet other bands of Turks to stay and slaughter?

"On they came, until they halted with a ragged flourish and threw themselves upon me. The leader, seizing my bridle rein, demanded my name, what government I served, by whose permission I was alive, and what I was doing?

"I shook my head, and inwardly calculated that my maps were about to strike open stretches on Slazek's breast. They tried me in several tongues, Bulgarian and Greek among others, always without result. I was trembling for the inevitable sortie of my men from the underbrush, as I pretended

by signs that I was of no importance to them. At last, when I dared wait no longer, I let them see that I understood them. They were crowding upon me cruelly, dragging me from my horse. I kept them close about me while I admitted, word by word wrung from me by their weapons pointed at my heart, that I had been an innocent offender; a mere mad Englishman, exploring for his own entertainment, protographing, it was true, and botanising, but without ulterior motive. I was spared execution in the end, but searched, stripped and tied to a tree, left to realise my outrage against the interior privacy of the Khedive's premises, while they rode away with my horse in their lead. It was not improbable that my own false Turks would work their way out. I felt so confident of it at first that I felt nothing else. I had trusted Slazek with a cypher His Majesty alone, would understand, if repeated as I gave it. The realisation of my own predicament only came to me later. All afternoon I strained at the cords which bound me. The sun came round the tree and found me. All sorts of small insects ran over my face and arms, an exquisitely contrived torture. At nightfall I had forgotten them for the torment of thirst. At dawn my flesh was so swollen and my mouth so dry I could scarcely swallow. It was not until after the noon of the second day, that an old hag gathering weeds for colouring, came within sight of my half

blinded eyes. She took me for a corpse, and tottered away with an outcry of terror. I did my best to scream after her, "Little Mother! Little Mother!" My tongue was so swollen I could not close my mouth and my voice was less than a groan. She must have had a soldier son, Allah reward her! for she came back bringing another younger peasant with her, after a time. They cut me loose and together dragged me like a dead animal into their hut. I don't know how long I was there. Lemaurrét, the French correspondent, who knew what I had undertaken, had me searched for, and I was found and moved at night, still unconscious. I came to myself in Stamboul, the charge of Russians and newspaper men who seemed to know all about me. They pinned a diamond star on my pajamas and said two of my men got through alive. Then I went off my head again, and they had a congratulatory dinner down at the Pera without the guest of honour, because he was raving wild with fever again, and counting always the instants between the open and the covert beyond,—That's all," he said, noting Raleigh's tense attention, hungering for more.

"But how did you come here alone?" he begged.

"Any old way. There was no reason for staying down there. The fellows had all scattered long before I could step alone. But the fever got me again, and —"

He fainted with his secret still untold.

All night and next day Raleigh attended him. He had wired at once for a physician from Buda, but it looked as if he would be superfluous if he came. At twilight the mist seemed to roll back from the stupors of mortal weakness and Heathleagh gave a clear look right up into the eyes that had watched over him all night and day.

“Don’t forget the address. See me off. Send me before you leave Belgrade. One thing more,—you will find a lot of poems in my despatch box,—queer trick for a man like me. Burn them. Nobody ever saw them but her. Some of them are not so bad,—but her husband might,— You have been white to me. Some chap will stand by you the same way! Take whatever you find and do what you like with it. It is yours. Wish I had more to leave. There will be no one to dispute you,—no heirs, no executors, no mourners. This is a private matter, no governments need apply! If you have loved a woman you have nothing to expect from heaven or hell,—you know it all! I meant at first to tell you,—but I can’t now —” That was all, not one word of the secrets his watcher was straining every nerve to hear. Only once more, at dawn, he roused himself to whisper, “I wish she knew,—that’s all”—and never spoke again.

His ceremonious burial did prove to be a govern-

ment affair after all. It was conspicuously attended for a man outside government and aristocracy. The newspaper men were there in a body and the War Office assisted. There were crossed Russian and English flags on the bier and many forms of funereal distinction and many masses for the repose of the soul, to whom heaven was about the only locality left unexplored. Raleigh read it all in the despatches. Every journal of any pretension reported it in full, but none told a breath of those state secrets his stiff lips had held back even in the garrulity of fever, even in the white hour of death. And the American, bitterly chagrined, had to admit himself checkmated in his heart's desire. He had wanted the kernel of an intrigue known to no living man, and he had got a thrilling story, and a mass of manuscript to increase the fame of the man who had kept his own counsel to the end. Only His Majesty knew the answer borne on Slazek's brown breast to the foot of the throne, and the message delivered in person, despite the glaring Cossacks that would have barred his access, and turned him back as an assassin, with their crossed lances. Before Raleigh had time to more than execute the simple order of action he had promised, his own cable came, and he moved southward in haste, steeled to keener effort, resolutely setting aside the advice to go home and live content with

love, while the enemies of the Turk and Martyrs of conviction bled to death in the massacres whose wild prayers for succour were unheard by Allah, Mohammed, or God himself, unless the Christian nations stood unfailing at their post.

CHAPTER VI

SHADOWS CAST BEFORE

OF all the incidents that he was free to relate afterward, there was none Raleigh told so well, so simply yet with such sure dramatic effect, as that tale of the dead man whose eyes he had closed at Belgrade. It set his own part in the tragedy in a modest but magnanimous light, carelessly as he might touch upon his great pity for the stranger. He may have enlarged a little on the poor boy's gratitude, but for some private restraining reason of his own, he omitted all mention of the poetic bequest of the deceased, though he never failed to light up with an increasing glamour how he had loved and hated the woman who had tricked him. Sometimes, when he had told the story until his own mannerisms had become unconscious, he would lower his voice at the end, saying earnestly, "I only wish I might meet her once,— for his dead sake!" Implying much. And his listeners were loth to break the spell, acquitting him of melodrama for sake of his personal part in the tragedy. He had been telling it to Grandee and the Trents one evening shortly after his return. They were out on the terrace, for the late afternoon was sul-

try in spite of September and the forest fires made the air depressing. Stephanie in one of her consolation gowns, a bit of Paris mysticism, occult in cut and line, had joined them only at the close. She lay back in her low willow chair, with her extraordinarily high bronze heels crossed before her, an epitome of indolence, hardly hearing what Raleigh was saying and making no effort at attention. Steven Randall, who had been strolling slowly up and down, had just returned to his chair beside her, while Christine and Jim finished their cooling tea, forgotten during the narrative.

"I wonder if there is always a woman behind every man, to account for what he does and leaves undone," Christine remarked, abstractedly.

"You remember Euripides called her 'the gleaming snare,'" suggested Grandee.

"And Omar 'this woman of enchanted clay,'"—Raleigh added.

"I should hate to think any woman capable of putting such conceptions of heaven and hell into the soul of any man, as this miserable victim held," Christine began.

"There is no heaven or hell," said Stephanie calmly, not troubling herself to glance in their direction. "And this man probably lied. All men lie about a woman, especially if the woman escapes them." As she spoke Joel Underwood's voice rose querulous and implacable from below:

"Raleigh, you are spoiling a rose vine!" It always made Stephanie open her eyes unusually wide to hear her husband spoken to like a naughty child, by the glum old gardener, whose creed was universal blight. Raleigh had been half sitting, half leaning against the terrace wall before them, as he spoke, with his back to the view.

"There, you have spoiled it!" Joel grumbled, coming up with his pruning shears to cut off the bruised branch. "You always was a two-legged devil in a garden," he continued, aggravated by the unimportance of his offence shown by this lawless outsider.

"It will grow right out again," Raleigh said easily.

"July's the growing month. Nothing grows in August, it ripens," Joel insisted, "and in September it waits for the frost,—if it has not been eaten up by insects or the worms' nests covered it."

"How is the garden, now?" Christine asked affably. Joel Underwood showed his contempt for so general an interest. He was capable of being Rabelasian in his conversation under due provocation, but he would have been surprised to hear it. He condemned her now in his general suspicion of all women who considered children before gardens.

If she had asked how the asters stood up under the heat, or remarked that his hollyhocks had wonderfully escaped mildew,—she might have been

worth answering. As it was, he confined himself to a non-committal answer such as her general query deserved.

"About as usual,—so so." Then compelled by his subject beyond control or regard of persons, he added generously,—“A bug for every flower.”

“But it is looking lovely!” Christine exclaimed. Jim Trent nodded his approval of her enthusiasm. There was a theory in some minds that he never talked unless he had to for money. “It is a nice quiet profession. I envy you,” he said.

“Gardening has fallen off. Nothing in it, as you may say, but worry”—Joel sighed.

He had one glass eye, and no one could exactly tell now whether he was looking at Stephanie or Christine. “There’s the cutty worm, and the rose lice, and the blight,” he enumerated, with pride at his opposition forces, “and the hollyhock rust, and ants, let alone the chance of drouht and mildew. Seems as if Providence set up nights thinking up insects. It is the plagues of the Scripture all over again.”

“You are a great realist, Joel,” Steven Randall commented.

“I talk it as it is,” returned Joel sourly.

“That is a lost art in itself,” said Jim Trent, speaking a second time, much to everyone’s surprise.

“Joel’s father was such a rabid optimist it made

a cynic of him," explained Randall, smiling. "It is apt to work out that way."

"Of course, if you see how anything looks, you would do the other. Any over-worked trait is trying, to live with," Christine put in shrewdly.

The humming birds, mad with colour and fragrance, were careening, on the emerald breezes of their own gauzy wings over the tall spikes of the red balm. A little cry of pleasure escaped Stephanie, who had been watching them, oblivious of all else about her. The charm of it appealed to the glitter-loving Viennese.

Joel Underwood followed her gaze to the honey-eyed heads slightly bowing, where the infatuated tipplers had passed.

"A toad is worth a hundred of 'em in a garden," he informed her. "Nineteen cents a week, I calculate, is the value per capita of every toad. These flimsy things take the honey from the bees and don't amount to anything, any way."

Stephanie made a little shrinking gesture of aversion.

"I had a shocking experience with a toad yesterday," she said, with another shudder. "I met it in the heliotrope bed, near where I sit. I hoped he would go away, but he sat there and stared at me with such a sinister expression,—I got up and gave him the afternoon for himself. He seemed like a bad dream or an evil omen."

"The cat likes the humming birds best, too," said Raleigh. "He agrees with you against Joel. See him sit and jerk his head off trying to watch them as they dart back and forth. It is quite an epitome of the eternal lure!"

"He would be worse off if he ate one," warned Joel. "How it would feel inside! All beak and whizz!"

"The ideal is said to be indigestible," Raleigh remarked.

"That is realism and life too, for you," said Randall, as they all laughed and Joel moved disapprovingly away.

"It is life, any way," Raleigh assented.

"I wonder if it is"—mused Grandee. "I have thought a good deal about that lately, now that my engagements are chiefly mental. What life is, what it ought to be, or might be. The Frenchman says the creator, by love or genius, alone lives. His theory holds that however crowned, the rest of us are only dead bodies, inanimate and outside the real existing universe."

Raleigh straightened himself for discussion. "The decreasing population of France needs the first propaganda to avert race suicide, and the artistic pride of France will support the other," he said. He felt a certain vague disapproval in Grandee's eyes of late. Perhaps it was only involuntary criticism, a covertly implied accusation.

To one whose approbateness was so justly developed it could not fail to be disconcerting, however politely veiled.

Steven Randall had watched his nephew's wife fondly. Was it strange if he noted an emptiness in her woman's heart, that Raleigh, a careerist at least, a casuist at best and by trade, was blind to? Was it not a natural misgiving for the wise old invalid to dread lest in sacrificing these years of their youth to worldly success and fame, they were forgetting the provision of age against loneliness and decay? Would not this highway of success prove a blind alley if it stopped short with this forceful creature, who must at last admit his end? Respect for the individuality of another, always sacred to him, kept him silent, but to-night he hoped Raleigh might respond to the hidden message from his deep desire. It seemed that he had, at first, for his next words caught eagerly at the Frenchman's last phrase.

"Life is either interpretation or creation"—he confessed, "and there is no joy like literary creation and nothing costs like letting it go."

"Do you keep up your writing at all now, Raleigh?" asked Christine. Grandee had wanted to ask it often, but his regret over Raleigh's dropping literature for finance and even diplomacy, was a sore point between them that they covered by mutual evasion.

"I may have tried to desert my first Love, but she rarely lets a man go," Raleigh replied, smiling to himself.

"There is really nothing to be made in poetry, is there?" asked Jim Trent.

"I had always hoped there might be immortality for a Payne in literature," put in Grandee sternly, as one whose gods were profaned by the commercial standard.

"It would almost seem to indicate a loss of power," Christine noted, tentatively.

"Well, since you force me to the defence," said Raleigh, still smiling, "though I meant it as a surprise for you all, I don't mind admitting that I am going to edit a volume of poems before long; as soon as I can prepare them for the printer."

"Why did you say edit? You mean they are to be published anonymously?" his uncle asked incredulously.

"I claim to be their editor, nothing more, on the title page." Raleigh's answer was non-committal. It did not satisfy his questioner.

"Why?" Steven Randall again enquired.

"Your imagination is at liberty to supply you with a host of plausible reasons, all sufficiently good, which may or not be the determining one in my case," Raleigh still parried.

"You mean that to make a literary venture would harm your political prospects in the sober judg-

ment of practical men,—impress the world as something one side and hinting a lack of balance?”

“Worse still, as something frivolous, even derogatory,” Raleigh assented, finishing out the sentence for him. Steven Randall thought a little, as if considering the situation from all sides, then he said positively:

“That will do for an excuse to the outside world, Raleigh, but underneath your hundred best reasons that you always have ready for your own justification, what is the real reason for anonymity?”

“It might be the very last one you would hit upon,—the truth,” Raleigh suggested, with a smile that was captivating but intentionally unconvincing. “Who knows but even in these complex and wicked modern times, I might be in reality simply what I claim to be,—the editor?”

Steven Randall tossed away his cigar as if the probability of such a truth went with it, as far as he was concerned.

“That might be true with another man,” he said quickly. “I know you too well to picture you devoting yourself to the success of another poet’s efforts.”

“You think me too selfish, sir?”

“Too busy at least.”

“All men have their whims, especially the poets themselves. Why should I not turn benefactor of

letters, if I happen to please?" Raleigh asked in defence.

"Because men in the public eye and in positions of authority cannot indulge in whims," Randall retorted. "Every one will know the poems are yours, and you far better sign them, or burn them up if you are ashamed of them. There is always something cheap about mysteries of authorship and they never clear up just as one expects them to."

"It seems to me an innocent enough little comedy,"—Raleigh said lightly, then added—"Even where it is a mere mask and not the simple truth."

"Will they be out in time so that I can send them to everybody for a Christmas present?" Christine asked eagerly. "Who publishes them? Your old firm?"

She was counting already on her fingers the number of copies to be ordered.

"Why, no, I believe not," Raleigh temporised. "I showed them to the most exclusive house in London and they said they wanted them. I have not written them my final decision yet. I am considering several alternatives."

Literally he had not given his word to any firm, or his consent to their publication at all, but the implied aspersion of his literary power to make good, pricked him to the decision. His mind was suddenly made up on a matter over which it had vacillated more than he cared to admit. He was in

the habit of being sure. Indecision like this seemed like doubt of himself.

"Bravo!" cried Steven Randall. "Then they must be the real thing and not too poor to claim when the right time comes."

"They tell me so. No one can tell how the public will take them. They do not sound like the minor poets, at least. Indeed I am afraid they are rather daring; perhaps they are too much steeped with reflection of the local colour of the East."

"What are they about?" Christine demanded.

"What are lyrics always about?" he counter-questioned, looking at Stephanie. But she was evincing little or no interest in the poems she might reasonably be expected to have inspired. Set apart by her own displeasure with Raleigh and her uncertainty as to the manner of her further punishment of him, she had turned a face of stone toward all his advances, refusing thus far to be propitiated. She instantly resolved now, not to be drawn into taking any interest in these American poems. She asked nothing and continued to express nothing, and Raleigh committed himself to his invariable truism,—least said soonest forgotten,—and did not press for favour. She wore the new Paris frocks and allowed him to adorn her finger with a superlative ring, but the old Stephanie was not there for him. She had never been lacking in spirit and Raleigh's leaving her behind after promising to take

her with him, had turned it into definite resistance, her eyes into steel and chained her heart in an armour of its own. She sat impassive, as the twilight deepened, watching the first magic flare of the fireflies phosphorescent in the meadows, and rising like errant stars to the garden terrace en fête for their amorous pleasure; while Raleigh discoursed on his theory of art and poetry, and Christine thought of the baby, and half decided to risk sending away the present nurse in the hope of getting a new one no worse,—and Steven Randall smoked and listened,—so fortunate it is that conversation is capable of varied forms of enjoyment.

“I do not agree with you. I do not believe a real poet can be a man of the world,” said Grandee coming to the surface at last. “He has got to have something cloistral in his nature, something that sets him apart. It is ‘the burden of the Valley of Vision’!”

“He has got to be a man of the world, on the contrary,—” Raleigh insisted, but just then the Trents rose to go.

“That was such a thrilling story you told us!” Christine said. “Be sure to tell us, if you ever find out who the woman was, won’t you?”

“It would be a picturesque situation, would it not?” he agreed. “A sort of unsworn vendetta.”

“You might make her fall in love with you, and then desert her, as she did him.”

"That would be lacking in the refinement of cruelty. I should choose a subtler form of slow torture for his vengeance," Raleigh protested gravely.

"Well, I am thankful you happened along to take care of the poor fellow. Think of our Freddie being off alone some day when he is grown up, and perhaps getting sick and being unhappy! I think we better not send him off to a fitting school, after all, Jim!" Stephanie had risen and made her good-nights with theirs. After they were left to themselves, Steven Randall turned sharply in his chair.

"Do you realise that no epitaph lives after a man like his own son?"

"I have waked up to the fact that I have no heir," Raleigh replied.

"Stephanie has no one in her life, but an old man who loves her devotedly, and a young man who is blinded by the part he has cast her to play in his career."

"She has a husband who never has thought twice of any other woman. That is not too commonplace a boast nowadays."

Randall's lips compressed as if he was doing something disagreeable to himself. Aggressive, conclusive, analytic as Raleigh was, he missed the exquisite balance between self-interest and the main principle,—the self-effacement that puts the

cause of an opponent in a fair discriminating light. He perceived a coarsening of the moral fibre, a tendency to blur a doubtful issue, an exaggeration of speech and attitude; a lowering of the tension in short, that holds a man firm to the unalterable truth unmindful of its effect upon his personal avail.

"I am not judging your scheme of life, Raleigh. I have no right to, above all not to interfere between man and wife. But you are both dear to me as my own blood, and I want to feel the old place here goes to others of your name. Of course there is Christine,—but I would be willing to die and leave my books and flowers to be sure another Raleigh Payne would cherish all I love, instead of strangers. I drop this hint for whatever it may be worth. At all events it seems to me you must not make business an excuse to decline the offices of humanity. There is such a thing as prostituting one's own for business ends that quite escapes the laws protecting women."

Only his habit of respect for his uncle kept Raleigh submissively silent. He detected this and laid a kindly hand on his nephew's shoulder. "A man cannot live for himself alone, my dear Raleigh. Seneca was right when he said 'Man was made men that they might help one another.' You owe Stephanie the same duty as yourself. I admit the tide in the affairs of men that must be taken at

the flood, but it will drown you in the end, if you permit it no turning. Stephanie has bent to your will these three years, as no American woman of her spirit would have done. She has been here alone all summer. You owe it to her to take a year for yourselves. Travel, settle down abroad where she will be happy and amused, and let Providence or Nature see to the revival of your old love for each other."

"I doubt if a *tete-a-tete* with me would exactly amuse her, in her present mood," Raleigh suggested.

"It is not too late. You have prevented her nature, but if you set yourself to winning her back she will discover with Antigone,—'*Je suis fait pour l'amour et pas pour la haine.*' And where love is God is, and where God is, is Life."

Raleigh was moved. His mouth showed it, and the warmth of the clasp his hand returned to the one outstretched him, as if to sweeten the bitterness of the attack.

"Give me just this winter first, sir. I must see the poems through the press and hold on in Wall Street till after January. Then, let it be as you say. Give me until February in New York and then if I can go, I will."

Randall hesitated. "You propose another winter like your last?"

"More or less. I must be in the West a few weeks right away, and then in Washington for a short time. You see, Uncle Steven, it is not known yet, but there may be a cabinet position vacant, also a new Ambassador at the post I have most coveted within a month or two. Either would suit my book perfectly. I do not say I am actually in line for either, but I am as well qualified as any man, and it will take money, as well as influence and other things. I have got to have one more winter to accomplish things: capital, more influence, you understand? Stephanie likes it, you know. You need not pity her. All women live on admiration. She was born for the very life I am giving her. Only imagine Christine Trent in her place or Stephanie in Christine's place, to convince yourself of the absurdity of it!"

"Women are all alike if you go deep enough," Randall objected sadly.

"Never! Stephanie is not domestic. She is a shining firefly. She dazzles like a humming bird, leaving the useful toad and the humble bee to their less spectacular vocations."

"Stephanie is a girl no longer," Randall persisted. "Remember, Raleigh, and never forget this I am going to remind you of, in America love is an episode of youth, steadying down to a mutual life of gain or loss for a common end. But abroad, love is a preoccupation and pastime of maturity.

Stephanie is not an American. You may draw your own conclusion."

"I decline to. She is a good Catholic."

"I consider that a difficulty in the way of your children. What about her religion? She has not heard mass for weeks, to my best belief."

"Children naturally take their father's religion."

"What is their father's religion likely to be, in this case?"

The question proved disconcerting.

"Both his religion and hers have got to keep quiet for a time. My relation with the Catholics is, at present, professionally hostile. Get her to be reasonable, if you can, Uncle Steven. They could use it against certain interests now, to a prejudicial degree, if the red shows through. The Catholics are all one pack and they hunt together. There is every kind of complication to be avoided. All the investigation of the last big corporation muddle I was in, was an Irish mix-up."

"None of which prevents your being more expressive, more the lover in your private life."

"Ah, well, these poems I am editing now show feeling enough! You will have no fault to find with them on that score."

Steven Randall scrutinised the face of his nephew narrowly, then he said seriously, as if inviting him to a desirable confidence between them, once for all, "What is your real motive for playing out a

farce like that? What possible good can come of it? It seems to me trivial, if not unworthy."

"It is a secret," Raleigh laughed. "And I believe you are proving the world's curiosity yourself, sir, by your unwillingness to believe me. It promises splendidly for the sale of the lyrics and proves the very point under discussion. There is nothing like a secret to make the outsider want to know what it is about!"

"A secret the world will scream from the house-tops at the start!" retorted Randall. "Your manner is perfectly recognisable to any one who has read you before."

"My earlier manner is perhaps,—but you forget I have published nothing I have written since my marriage. The conquest of a woman gives a man a store-house of lyric material he never dared approach, much less express."

Randall looked annoyed. He could not bring himself to say how any exploitation of Stephanie would shock and repel him. "I do hope they are not decadent stuff, all physical intimacy and morbid satisfaction—" he began.

"They are rather hot, I warn you."

"Better unpublished then —"

"Better unclaimed beyond a doubt," Raleigh agreed without loss of temper.

"When do you intend to confess to your public?"

“Let us see how they are received first. And mind you, Uncle Steven, I have not admitted, even to you under pressure, they were my own. No one but Stephanie would be able to say whether such fires were burning in the hold of my ship of life, as it sails serenely on the surface waters. She knows me better than any of you, after all. And as to your complaint of my indifference toward her, wait till I am famous! A man shows a woman how he loves her by marrying her, once for all. He cannot be on exhibition with his feelings. If anything threatened Stephanie, no man would shoot straighter than I. But nothing is threatening her. And as to her religion, you recall the saying of Gibbon, no doubt, ‘all religions are equally true in the eyes of the people, equally false in the eye of the philosopher, equally useful in the eye of the magistrate’!”

And the only consoling hope Steven Randall held, at the end of their rather unsatisfactory talk, was the certainty that Raleigh’s ambition would not prove impervious to the hint of an inheritance and a continuing name.

CHAPTER VII

THE WINTER OF THEIR DISCONTENT

THE house Raleigh had taken for the winter was fashionably located, and superb, if impersonal in effect. What it lacked in association it made up in scenic background. In spite of the theory that the tired business man, that alleged ogre preventing ideal levels in theatre and music, must be amused,—Stephanie might be said to have listened her way into men's favour. Man is still male enough to like to shine. And there was something in her way of listening that evinced a closer interest than the mere topic required,—a something enclosing his personality with a glow of aroused possibilities unsuspected by the dazzled owner of the same. She did not, in fact, allow herself to think of other things, and merely punctuate their recitals with appropriate and discriminating use of the word "Really?" or "How clever of you!" The common interpolations of Yes? and No? were never on her lips, yet one felt she had followed, and expressed more than the words of her voluble rivals, who tried to charm by meeting their entertainers half way and on their own ground. To some men her eyes were

the explanation of her sympathy. They warmed delightfully; and again there was a dawning of disdain in them, that warned from hotter pursuit of a subject she disliked. She saved men her own displeasure often thus, and they were grateful afterward. She even saved them from a blunder with others, for their own sake, by the same illusory method. When she understood the subject on which they were talking, her own wit was no less ready or her tongue less halting than that of the precocious little girl of Carlsbad long years ago. But she so rarely did understand! Of art and music she heard little from these Americans, and what she heard of their lives and occupations left her small opening beyond the pretty small coin current in social interchange; flattery, repartee, the turning of a phrase. She quickly saw their preference for her as a foreigner, and adhered to her rôle with consummate tact, keeping her own counsels and making no entangling admissions as to her own conclusions. To-night there was one man only, at the dinner Raleigh was giving for a certain Senator likely to be of use to him later,—by whom she might possibly have spent a forgetful hour or two. He was a young attaché from the German Legation at Washington, who had happened over to New York and been included as an afterthought. His importance was too trivial to give him the coveted place by her side, and he had sulked over it

at first, bored by the woman next him through no fault of hers but his own inward disappointment.

"I have so often wondered, since I first met you, over your opinion of our American men and American life in general," Senator Fordyce was saying to Stephanie now, but she could not be drawn out, and the glance of the young attaché was openly commending. They two were of a different civilisation. Their opinions were not made and re-made every few hours and scattered down the wind, like those of these versatile and unreserved Americans. To deliberate, was not to speak one's true thought, and never to strangers. He admired the resistance of his hostess and again sincerely cursed his neighbour for talking to him, so that he could not listen satisfactorily.

"I suppose we must seem terribly in earnest, after your sluggish old Europe,—eh?" he prodded, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"You do seem always to be in a terrible hurry"—she admitted, through her long eyelashes, her own eyes smiling indulgently. "When the servants observe Mr. Payne driving to the door, they call to any other within hearing, 'Hurry up! Mr. Payne is coming'!"

"Well, yes, I suppose we are all haunted by the dream of getting there—"

"You go always by '*grande vitesse*,' as we say, you seem not to care too much where it is that

you arrive, as in how few minutes it cost you. I hear always spoken by the American men, 'I can go from the City Hall to the tomb of Grant in so and so many minutes. It is not that you really care to be at either of your destinations, it seems, but it pleases you to feel your body hurled through space. And after, to gain time to go between two other places, where you never will care to remain!'

"But all the same, my dear lady, we do arrive," said Willerson, on her left, the great railroad magnate of the West.

"But it is always of transit, I hear so much spoken, rapid transit."

"It is because we know we shall arrive at last that we hurry so, and economise time at both ends. We do not decorate over here, but on my roads we raise the pay of any engineer who beats his own record until it changes a time table even by the fraction of a minute. There is nothing but our own record fast enough to beat!"

"We are our own ancestors, in a sense. We have got to bequeath ourselves a fortune and a name before we are put up on the top shelf by the youngsters," explained the Senator.

"And to do that in a country where every other fellow is doing the same thing, requires celerity!" cried Willerson.

"Exactly," agreed Senator Fordyce again. "We are nobody to-day, the ruling magnate to-

morrow. Born poor, we have to allow for time to die rich."

Stephanie was listening deliciously. One white ring-bedecked hand on her wine-glass, which she seemed to have forgotten to raise.

"Did you ever ride on a locomotive?" Willerson asked her abruptly.

She gave him a negative shrug and smile.

"That would give it all to you in no time. Europe rides in the Pullman with the doors locked. The American is the engineer, out in the night and storm with Nature and Life and Death. That is the difference. I will take you for a run some time, out West, perhaps. Your husband has promised to make a flying trip with me later in the season. After you have ridden on a cow-catcher through the Rockies you will get the idea without much auto-suggestion!"

"You see, my dear Mrs. Payne," Senator Fordyce explained, convinced that his method of enlightening her was less primitive. "You do not understand our underlying principle. No one stays put over here. Everything shifts and everyone moves up accordingly. I do not know about Austria, but I take it in England a man who tends gate at a railroad crossing was the son of a man who tended the same gate. What was good enough for his father is good enough for him. And nothing is good enough for us!"

"Nor half good enough for our women!" said Willerson, with a glance for his wife, a handsome woman superbly gowned, the oldest daughter of a millionaire down on his luck, that Willerson was said to have married from the cashier's desk in the Golden Alhambra Hotel at San Francisco.

Stephanie raised her glass. Both men admired the beauty of her throat as she drank. When she resumed her part in the conversation it was with a platitude, intended to set them going again, probably.

"It is also true in Austria. We remain where we were born, bien placés or to the contrary."

"That kind of ancestor worship would not go over here, unless we set up shrines to ourselves while we were alive," said Willerson, cutting his bird as if it had been an offering to his own personal divinity that had shaped his ends so satisfactorily.

"That is what makes our society so vital," put in the Senator. "There is no old stagnant blood, half luxurious idleness, half musty Port, in our veins. Our people are making and unmaking a country, a history and themselves. They are light of touch, quick of action. It is now or never always with our men and women. The past they are done with, and the future is a margin they do not trade on too much."

"The equilibrium being assured by our all liv-

ing so fast we can't fall off!" said Willerson, "we have no time for trifles. We work like fury and play on the dead run and do both twice as hard as the other."

"And do you rest as violently as you work?" Stephanie asked, really curious to hear what the answer would be.

"When we rest it is under Doctor's orders, with a warning at our temples, held up like a mail-train in a lonely gulch." Willerson spoke as if a spectre had invaded the conversation. The Senator continued, still addressing Stephanie exclusively, "The national poise, such as it is, comes from the upward strain. Nobody is content. You must have noticed that in our American women. They are always after something more,—something just out of reach the moment before—"

"They are very wonderful," murmured Stephanie, taking her cue devoutly.

"They are!" said Willerson. "It is due to them that we have an approach to an aristocracy ourselves now, though no sane man would dare define or determine it. But the material of which our world is made up to-day in New York, is an amalgamated product. The American men are of native stock idealised. There are not many immigrants in society, yet, though they are in full cry for the goal. But the women! Violet girls one generation, and ladies of the Waldorf corridors

the next! Our power of assimilation is not confined to business, not at all! And the American man is not afraid to marry the starriest eyes he sees looking his way and trust his own nerve to set them up in a heaven of his own providing. Education is free, and culture, while it is not a matter of money, can be had for money in such a close imitation it often passes for the real thing. There is less of that of course, but we rise, we rise! We are the dream of evolution vindicated. We are evolving a nation of influential citizens out of riff-raff, and we understand each other because so many of us came up the same road, or our immediate people before us."

"One must not boast too much of culture," demurred the Senator, "it is too often of the Club variety. Club culture and syndicated thought are too much like tinned food to bear advertising.

"O well, the clever women come to the top, and there is any place for any one who has the eyes to see it and the pluck to get it."

"It is a new idea to me," Stephanie said softly. "I had always an idea that men did what they wished and women what they must."

"The American woman does not take what is left, I assure you. She is after what she wants quite as fast as any of the men," insisted Willerson.

"It fails in repose, perhaps a little, this idea of life?" she suggested.

"O there is repose enough, Woodlawn is full of it!" cried Willerson, "So is Greenwood. American repose comes after death. You never saw more determined monuments to it than those erected to us by our grateful widows. Angels of Peace, soothing selections of scripture wreathed in poppies,—and they are off to Europe in clothes that are a regular mourning frolic, to do us credit by their second marriage,—always higher in the social scale."

Stephanie shrank a little. "How very terrible you are! It is not so, is it, Senator For-dyce?"

"Yes, I am afraid they do rise on stepping stones of our dead selves to higher things," he parodied with mock regret. "But they deserve their reward. They help earn the money and they put up with a good deal, first and last. They are good partners and shrewd players in the game of life. They are true till death and what more does the prayer book even demand?"

"And do they all do this that you say, from love or calculation, then?" she asked, bewildered a little by the unfamiliar point of view.

"Love on the start, usually, almost always. Then, the great American game of Success absorbs them both. The women have heads. They see

further than we do often, while they seem busy with their children and their social duties."

"And their hearts—" Stephanie said vaguely.

"O they put all that part of themselves into their children. Love goes down you know. We men have no time. It is a wise father that knows his own child nowadays."

"But one hears so much of your divorce scandals—" she began.

"That sort of thing is for the idle, not the ambitious," Willerson dismissed the notion as if he had been asked if he liked poetry. There was a momentary lull. The straying eyes of the attaché met those of his hostess and exchanged a sub-conscious comfort, before they veered from conscious etiquette.

Senator Fordyce leaned forward and spoke to a man sitting next beyond him on the same side.

"They tell me you have been up to Sky High to see Randall, this week, Doctor; how did you find him? Improving, I hope?"

Doctor Wylin, an old friend of all the Randalls, and one of the noted and peerless clairvoyants of his profession, responded with enthusiasm.

"He is so full of joys and animosities that he made me feel old beside him!" he exclaimed. "I found him reading the last of James and Hitchens, and crazy over De Bussy music as no one should be who is not reckless and bad and ultra-modern

and mondaine. His heart, I fancy, soliloquises at times,—but his head vibrates to the life of all key-notes, the more intricate the measure the better for him."

"You are very old friends?"

"Yes, we hunt in the same pack, though we seldom hear each other's voice or catch the fire of each other's eyes. It is a tribal affinity, as a friend of mine expresses it." He did not add that he was in his place at this very dinner because of Randall's repeated entreaty of him to keep Raleigh in sight. And some one at the moment was asking him for some of his recent Balkan experiences. Others urged, glad of a respite in their own efforts to be thought amusing. Raleigh hesitated becomingly, seemed to be searching for the right thing, and began the story of his encounter with the Messenger of Belgrade. He had never repeated it since landing, except to the family, but he had never told it better. He was at ease with himself and his world to-night. Stephanie was looking her best and playing up just as he wanted her to. He had made an unexpected 'coup' in Wall street during the week, the dinner had gone admirably, and the men it had been desirable to impress had appeared elated to be there, and confident of his right to a place of honour among them and governmental recognition for his service. The Senator and the Railroad King had met on the

great American level that sets all men bragging of a common cause, and Stephanie had known precisely the one line on which this result was sure. He complimented her in his heart, even as he was speaking. Only a few weeks more of this sort of thing and he could venture to take his hand off the lever for a little while,—a few months perhaps, a summer,—no more,—but long enough to devote himself exclusively to Stephanie and set their relations right. They had drifted unaccountably apart, still she shared his projects, he included her in all his dreams, and that was more than most men did, until after they were realised at least. She ought to feel the flattery of his reliance upon her tact to-night. He had put an important situation in her hands, and both men were smiling, well pleased with themselves and with her. And she was his.

The wine had been good and he told his favourite story well. No one at the table had heard it before or ever would again. He made a mental note of each one present. Stephanie of course was a partial exception, but a man's wife in such matters is a negligible quantity. She had only heard the end, any way, and given it little or no attention in her joy over those dervish humming birds. And is it not a part of a woman's sworn, "for worse," to listen to her husband's old stories? Stephanie was a comprehending if subtle claque. He

glanced toward her constantly as he made his points tell. There was just the right touch of self-effacement in the way he subordinated his own mission, to the brutal achievement of the dying man,— just the right art in the balance preserved, while he set it in all its savage cruelty before these people in evening dress, in a hot room perfumed with red roses and early hyacinths. It took so well that he italicised the dead man's bitterness toward his Mistress, whose base betrayal of a chap like that, he, Raleigh Payne, had been carried away to wish he might yet have an opportunity to acquit as it deserved. He went a little beyond his real information or feeling, stretching the situation to suit the effect of his recital on the nerves about him, forgetting perhaps just what had been the bald truth of the experience, in its adaptation to literary values. For even a story must be successful and serve the moment's glory to the full, for Raleigh Payne. Suddenly he gave the name he had hitherto withheld. A name added just the necessary touch of realism, and this name one man at the table at least, the attaché from Washington, would be likely to know and appreciate.

Stephanie was suddenly aware of a current of air blowing lightly over her tomb, where no sculptured American angel of peace kept guard. What was it the man half way down the table was saying? They had presented him as an attaché of

some legation, had they not? What name was that he was repeating? Had he actually spoken it or had it come by some trick of memory?

“Nicholas Heathleagh.”

Who had thrown a pebble into the tarns of memory,—the dead pools of the past, to raise that name to the echo? It was not a name known out of Europe,—hardly west of the Russian frontier. It was the foreigner of course, who had repeated it. “So it was Nicolai’s fate to die alone in Belgrade. It was an honour for you, Mr. Payne.”

Nicolai dead, entrusting his honour to the hands of the man he had thirsted to kill! For an instant she was again back in Austria. The table with its represented power of men, and glory of decoration that was money, sank away from her like Klingsor’s garden of enchantment.

Nicolai was dead. And it was Nicolai’s story Raleigh was re-telling, and Nicolai’s revenge he was promising himself openly the pleasure to perform.

The Senator was complimenting her on her rapt attention —

“I am always a good listener,—I attend very well, always,” she said, with a dry throat that made her words sound strangely to herself.

“But to your own husband?” archly.

“Ah yes, I hear my husband speak at length but seldom,—and after, we women abroad are not ex-

pected to be able to talk, as your women who are so talented. We try to look as charming as the good God permits, and for the rest we listen."

And the eyes of the Senator and those of the Railroad King met, with an expression of "here at last is a woman!" an involuntary betrayal of all those principles of the liberated sex enunciated by both.

"Nicolai is dead"—Stephanie repeated to herself as she looked in her glass in her own room, to satisfy herself she had not lost colour. "Eh bien! He is dead, and I was once so mad over him! What imbeciles of passion we both were 'autre fois'! And how the Countess, my grandmother, was wise to protect me from a false step! It was all her inspiration,—our marriage at Aix out of season, with no public to assist, and after,—no clue in the name of Mrs. Raleigh Payne. Dieu, but what a precipice opening to-night! Raleigh must never repeat that story of Belgrade,—and how to prevent him? How to take it from him, like a new toy from a child, without arousing his suspicion?" She knew but too well that any stranger, without intending evil, on hearing this recital might speak the name of the Countess Stephanie Marie Louise Graubach von Lichtenberg,—then all was lost. Raleigh had exaggerated her relation with Nicolai, but he would believe the worst, as Nicolai had evidently intended him

to. That had been the silent revenge of a lover betrayed but adoring, even in the hour of death. To tell Raleigh? To make an end of this terror, perhaps imaginary? "No, a thousand times! To him, in spite of all I could say, I should be guilty. He would never believe me innocent!" Her sophistication protested. She judged him from a foreign standard, without reckoning on the confidence Americans place in those they love, and shrank from the inevitable result as she conceived it. The help of a Priest, of holy counsel and direction, appealed to her irresistibly. She knew from Sister Angela that one of the Convent Confessors had been sent to assist in establishing a French parochial school in America. But how to reach him? How to elude Raleigh's restrictions without exposing herself doubly to his displeasure? These were the conflicting fears that would not let her sleep, even after the street cleaners began their scuffling noises outside her carefully shielded windows.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WHITE SWALLOW

THE winter had been one of constant, changing, and progressive excitement to Raleigh. The announcement of the forthcoming volume of poems, however stoutly he disclaimed them, established him as a social lion within the inner circle of the literary élite, quite apart from and unrelated to his larger interests.

Stephanie had thrown herself into the pageant of their triumphal procession, with a grace that demanded not, if it was to eventually lead up to Parnassus itself, or some sacrificial pyre. She knew her part and played it to perfection. Raleigh felt she had forgotten or laid aside her summer's pique, and in return did all that lay in his power to please her,—even to dropping his favourite story from his répertoire and foregoing the applause it always won, since she disliked the reputation of “*raconteur*,” that she pronounced an inferior gift for a man of distinction. He had entire confidence in her taste, and if she declared story-telling a bore, he was ready to accept her verdict and adopt the finer art of conversation.

“It is not really *comme il faut* to monopolise, is

it?" she had asked indifferently. It set him thinking until her next remark,—“One is much impressed with the American’s custom of speaking all the time of himself and his experience, because in Europe one holds oneself more, as the French say,—one does not confide too much. That is why the American in society fails of the chic, the distinguished silence of the man who is well-born abroad.”

He had raised no discussion and made no defence. He saw her point too clearly for that; so clearly that he acted upon it, much to his own advantage. His manner gained, applauded by her with consummate flattery after each occasion where the fatal story remained untold, and he allowed other men to make an effort to amuse and capture him; a change in attitude that duly impressed itself upon the keen observers about him, who noted his quiet assurance as that of a man who had reached his goal and was beyond need of them. As Stephanie had foreseen, it added to his prestige, beside calming her own apprehensions that stalked in alarming numbers in the darkest hours before the dawn.

Raleigh and herself, to look upon, were as blithe a young vision as ever strayed out of the golden age to smile down from a chariot upon an applauding populace. Circumstances of course involved them in widely divergent ways. They did not keep

the same hours or the same engagements, nor could he be said to keep any hours at all; coming and going as he was, meshed in labyrinths of appointments and important conjunctions with other equally hurried and ambitious men, all dovetailing equally exacting demands on time and strength. So that his request to be admitted at the door of her own sleeping room, one February night, or morning rather, for it was between two and three by the clock, took her quite by surprise.

He never had realised the strain he had put upon her, until to-night. Measured by his own it was slight, but as she stood, half bewildered by the sound of his voice, in her pale rose peignoir, her soft hair falling back from her face, she looked like a weary child.

"Are you ill, Raleigh? What has happened?" she asked, frightened as by an apparition. It revealed at a glance the distance between them. It embarrassed him also. "When did you return?" she asked again, as he did not explain his presence.

"May I come in a moment?" he said, trying to conceal his chagrin at his own discovery, "I am obliged to go on to Washington sooner than I expected and by a much earlier train than usual. I told you I should not go until later, but I find I cannot keep any of to-morrow's engagements here. You will explain for me? Please be especially gra-

cious to Christine about her luncheon for she made it instead of a dinner on my account."

She drew back to allow him to pass into the room. The mere necessity of taking his directions assured her and set her at ease.

"I will search my engagement book for the others,—” she said, “there were also guests for dinner here, I believe.”

They ran over the list together. When they had finished, he did not go.

“That is all?” she suggested gently.

“Not quite,” he said, and she noticed his eagerness. She had never seen him so excited, so little master of himself as in the first days of his courtship. She saw then that he held a book in his left hand, which he now held out to her. As he did so, he stepped over by the bed and turned on the reading light invitingly. She took the volume from him and opened at once to the title page.

“You like the cover?” he asked. He could not wait.

“It is in perfect taste,” she assured him warmly.

“Of course with poetry as with music, it is the sound of the instrument not the case that matters,—still—” he was boyish in his desire to know if she was pleased. He wanted her to admit him supreme on all sides.

“Music is said to be the sound of the soul,” she said slowly, “poetry is the prayer, perhaps. It

was charming of you to bring them to me first of all."

He kissed her warmly. It seemed to her that he kissed himself in her, and his joy in this new evidence of his own power, more than Stephanie. She missed any sense of losing himself in the caress, any letting go to the influence of the embrace.

He took the book from her again, "Read the inscription," he begged, opening it for her. She read it in a flash, then without lifting her eyes from the page "One could persuade oneself that it was inspired by love,—even passion, and the object of that passion a woman"—she said as if incredulous,—half mocking the intensity of his mood which she did not understand.

"And one would not be mistaken!" he cried.

She allowed him to come close to her and look over her shoulder, as she turned the pages at random, half seeing the words, careless of more than a first casual impression. He watched her face kindling here and there at a line whose import she seemed to divine rather than fully comprehend.

He caught at it as a hint of her pleasure in this evidence of his devotion. "Stephanie darling, listen to me for a few minutes to-night, before I am obliged to go. There is so much to make us happy to-night! You are narrow about love. There are so many kinds, and so many ways of showing it!

And you have been determined there should be but one. If a man writes a volume of lyrics in praise of the woman he loves, it is really no more than any one of a dozen equally real, if not equally passionate, expressions of feeling for which she is responsible. She is no more the inspiration of his poetry than of his schemes of finance, or the success of a national intrigue. It is all hers and for her and because of her."

"Perhaps"—she said doubtfully, raising her eyes slowly to his, "but in a language here more natural to a woman's heart."

"Then if all my other plans to make you proud count as nothing, you will accept the lyrics, with my dedication to you, in love?"

"I shall be proud and happy to imagine that after three years of married partnership, an American has still the sentiment remaining to offer any woman,—and that woman in this case his legally wedded wife!" she replied, still mocking at his earnestness.

She turned back to the title page with its equivocal inscription, as if to escape his mood which she failed to fully share or understand. Aloud she repeated "Lyrics of an Unknown." "Edited by Raleigh Payne."

"And you alone out of all the world hold the key to the secret!" he cried impulsively. "The world is at liberty to guess,—it is to be expected

that no denial from me can prevent pretty conclusive surmise, but you alone know why they are too sacred to brand with a name. The hidden beauty of a woman is beyond desecration of her poet's word even, as her soul is beyond his faintest caress. How could a poet keep silence who had loved you?" He kissed her on her mouth. She trembled slightly. He felt instantly that she was right and he had been stupid to be so embarrassed and make a scene with his own wife in his own house, although the hour was unconventional, even compromising. How many weeks had they preserved their formality with each other? How long since their mutual play had been exclusively for the gallery? After all, it was not strange that they were constrained by finding themselves alone together under the unique conditions associated with their earlier tenderness. Whose eyes were sweet as hers? To whom did that weary mouth owe its tribute, but to him? How often she had told him she was made for love,—and was he an Eremité? To-night it was important,—it was necessary, that she should love him too blindly to remember his words or forget his emotion. He wanted her to lose herself in him, to save only his awakened sense of her.

He held her now with the old passion. She did not resist. He thought the old storm of instinct had caught her too, and that she relaxed in

his embrace as if yielding to long pent emotion.

"Stephanie," he murmured, "forgive me! I have been a fool. I have made other gods before you. I have broken Love's first and greatest commandment, perhaps, but it was for you! Love is after all such a many-sided and practical thing to me. It is myself going to your day's pastime through you, and you going to my work in me. I wanted to make a career fit for you to share and the competition is beyond your wildest dream. I have never forgotten the indignities heaped upon me by the old Countess, your grandmother, or the humiliations she forced me to accept as the price of her niece. I have sworn, day and night, to raise a pedestal fit for so peerless a creature as my wife. You have been wonderful! You have helped me and never cried out, or blamed me or questioned my right to use you for our mutual ends. But to-night I see what I have done. How it has wearied you, and how you have suffered from not fully understanding me! Forgive me darling, and let us get over a few weeks more only, and I will take you away from business and politics and we will go back to some lovely spot of our honeymoon, and be lovers again. Shall we?"

She knew the necessity of asserting her power over him now. Her eyes were half shut as she clung to him in silence. He took it for acquiescence. In her love moods, speech was always alien to her.

With something of desperation, like a child left too long in the dark alone, she sobbed herself to sleep in his arms at last. The numb loneliness broken and a softened comprehension established between them without words. He left her reluctantly, still asleep, and crept away to work until daylight and catch his early train southward.

Stephanie wakened late. Waking was the event of all the day she always dreaded most. This morning she wakened with a consciousness of something having happened. What was it? Had she really a Lover? Husband he might also be, yet capable of giving to life the one meaning without which, to women like her, it has no reason for being. She lay in a vaguely remembering state, half dream, half realisation, letting the emotions of the night revive again in the senses. Until with this thrill of reassurance of Raleigh's feeling for her, came the terror again, and expedience was immediately pleading for full confession. If Raleigh did love her, even in his cold American way,—in absence and repression,—surely he would condone the innocent passion of her first inexperience. She owed it to herself, to be rid of the fear that lay between them, since he had given her this proof of his indisputably sincere devotion. He spoke of Europe again, together and soon. How could she hazard Europe with exposure menacing her there at every street corner, where they might encounter

ghosts of the past? If the future was to be love between them she must remove this black beast from her path. His honour was his fetish. But she would swear to him Nicolai had lied in his desire to inflict a wound upon him who stole her away from Austria and her girlish promises. She would stake everything on the intoxication of his senses, she would even abase herself, be submissive, anything to vindicate herself and set herself free from this haunting dread of losing all she had won so dearly of place and power, and now the hope of passion, which to her was life's only prize. She would do it in Raleigh's arms,—she knew when and how. He should believe her as proud, as stainless as himself. Then let the world howl, it could do her no harm.

It was not until just before she was leaving the house for luncheon,—the luncheon planned for Raleigh's convenience, to meet some foreign friends at the house of Christine, that she actually opened the volume of poems again, about which her thoughts constantly circled as she dressed.

The English verse was too difficult for her to fully enjoy. She began to read, translating into French to be sure she got the meaning.

"*Si dans la mort mon âme —*" she read, then vexed with herself, made a little gesture of impatience, chiding herself for not trying to enjoy or at least comprehend in English.

"If I in death outwing the fleet white swallow."

"*L'hirondelle blanche*"—her heart echoed—
She stood transfixed, scarcely breathing. I do not understand! What does it signify? she asked herself in vain. She read on, pale, then flushed, as one under the influence of some hidden spell. Nothing since her marriage had spoken to her like this. Raleigh as a poet was also a lover, a new possibility, a sixth sense. And yet why did some of these lines of his sound of the sea reverberating afar off but persistent? If this was indeed Raleigh, her lover as he would have her believe, speaking to her, singing of her, life was not over but just begun. Yet what strangely familiar rhythm was it that haunted her, lingering yet vanishing? She was increasingly confused until just that one of the poems she had last read, by its oddity of form and beat, came back to her entirely in French, though she had but glanced at the first two lines.

"*Si dans la mort mon âme*"

then disconnected phrases, "*l'hirondelle blanche*"—"les ailles pales"—while about her whispered the accents of the moonlit waves. Whose voice but Nicolai's was this at her ear? Whose hand but his on the bridle of her white steed, forced trembling and rearing into the August flood until

the foam broke about her, lapping as some fawning creature luring its prey? It had been his to project just that wild ride outwinging the white swallow of death, and his in abject terror to drag her back to life and misery. Why did she feel the soft sinuous body of her horse under her now? Why was it Normandie and no longer America? Suddenly the room became too light. Everything that had been clouded, became at once transparent. She saw and understood. Her secret was to remain forever her own. There need be no confession of it. She knew that, first of all. She knew also why it would always be so. Her own safety was now for ever and ever assured. She knew also why she despised her husband, the smiling, popular, successful Raleigh Payne, the poet and diplomat. Well let him smile,—since it was the seal set upon their mutual freedom. “*Lâche!*” she whispered, “one would respect him more if he had the courage to steal outright!” Out of all the world there was but one who could read the carefully veiled translations of that lyric volume, and recognise the originals as the poems breathed forth to her at the full moon and flood tide of Nicolai Heathleagh’s midsummer madness. Raleigh Payne had veiled his treachery to the dead man with all possible skill. He had reduced his own risk to a minimum and accepted it, trusting his lucky star to keep one woman lost in oblivion. And

that one woman was to be found upon his own breast.

"Il faut qu'il ne sache pas! Jamais, jamais jusqu' à la mort!" she murmured. "All that I know he must never suspect that I dream. The person that shares his secret he will hate for it, because it is an unworthy one. It remains now to enact the drama together, only. It is not life we shall live. It is not love. It is the tragi-comedy of two,—the man and his wife!"

"The motor, if you please, Mrs. Payne," the butler announced, as she still stood motionless, with the lyrics yet open in her hand at the page where she had first read.

"If I in death outwing the fleet white swallow —"

her own heart undulating upon the waves of her Normandie beneath an August moon. And she went down the marble stairway, crossed the regal hall and entered the limousine, as an actress through the wings of a stage to her next appearance before the footlights, with the cry of Voltaire in her soul,

"Lisbonne est abimé et l'on danse á Paris!"

CHAPTER IX

"SOME LITTLE TALK OF ME AND THEE"

"**M**RS. PAYNE wishes, if convenient, you would come down to tea, sir." The butler delivered the message at the door of Raleigh's own especial sanctum on the third floor where he carried on his private and important affairs.

"Presently," he replied, then turning back to his secretary, "Just run these over, and do them as you have the others, Miss Macy. I will sign them, of course, later."

"Yes, Mr. Payne."

"And never mind about those marked with a cross,—and these on the left you may destroy, after glancing them over to be sure, in my hurry I have not overlooked anything important. That is all in connection with this morning's mail, in a literary way, is it not?"

"There is the answer to Horace Weeden, in regard to collaborating with him in a five act tragedy for the New Theatre, sir."

"Is that all?"

"No, Mr. Payne, there are the lyrics Miss Kemper sent for your criticism, and Mrs. Oliver

Drown's letter, asking advice as to whether you thought she had better go on with novel writing or try a dramatic play for acting purposes." The secretary spoke in that singularly colourless voice, untinged with any sentiment whatever, of one so long accustomed to doing other people's affairs for them that nothing was ever personal.

"What else?" Raleigh spoke in response to her uplifted hand, showing still another bunch of envelopes he had not seen before.

"A request for permission to dedicate a lyric drama to you, and seven letters asking for an autograph, with or without quotation; two copies of the Lyrics to be signed and three of the Hesse photographs to be autographed, and"—Raleigh laughed outright, "Well, well we are celebrated!" he exclaimed. "We really are! The editor of the Lyrics is, I mean. He is to be congratulated on his estimate of the world's curiosity. The Secretary flushed as if she could not bear to hear him belittle himself even to her.

"Why, Mr. Payne, the Lyrics have made a new mark in American literature," she protested. "There has never been anything like them. Everyone sees through the editorial bluff. That is the reason they all write for your signature. You ought not to be surprised. No one else is! I am holding ever so many other appeals for your decision when you can give me the time to attend to

them. The Woman's Column of the 'Busybody' wants a copy of your favourite poems. The 'Times' Supplement will take an item on your summer plans and what you intend to write next. 'Poetry-in-America' wants an article of four thousand words on 'How to Write Poetry That Burns at the Heart.' The 'Literary Advocate' wants both a sitting and standing picture for reproduction, and Amméde, the photographer for 'Celebrity,' wants you to give him a sitting at your earliest possible convenience, beside all the other personal interviews I have refused, as you told me to do, without speaking to you about them."

"You don't say the poems are as bad as all that!" he said, really serious now. "What do you think of them yourself,—that is, if you have read them?"

"I never read anything like them," the girl said unhesitatingly. "They make me feel alive all over, just like wine. It is another world!" But he was already at the door.

"You are prejudiced!" he warned her gaily, "but I will tell the real author when I see him. Meantime, get in another girl to help you. I cannot spare a minute of Reardon. He has his hands over-full of business matters just now." He would have been gone but the man at the typewriter called him back.

"One moment, Mr. Payne! You said to remind

you that you wished to revise your letter apropos of your diplomatic reappointment and the government offer."

"Later!" Raleigh promised, as he ran down the stairs.

"That is what it is to be famous," said the girl, holding up the photographs.

"Never saw anything like it in my life!" said Reardon, a man with steely eyes and no colour in his face. "He wants the earth, and when he gets it he will try for the stars!"

"He will get them, too," the secretary agreed, "and put them under Mrs. Payne's feet, with all the rest. She does not begin to appreciate him."

"No woman could," said Reardon. "Any other man would be a politician or a business man and done with it. He is up to his neck in both, and in the thick of it all he has to get this literary bee in his bonnet! And that has given him a hand up in a new quarter. He can have whatever he wants now."

"He is a genius all right," said the girl with a sigh as if she regretted the admission as soon as it was made.

"He is a politician all the same," objected Reardon, pushing back his chair with a long tired yawn and crossing over for a new supply of paper.

"He is a gentleman, any way!" cried the girl cordially, remembering the volume of Lyrics pre-

sented to her with her patron's signature and a pleasant word of gratitude for her assistance.

"That's right, too," agreed Reardon. "He sent his own car to take mother to church the Sunday she spent in town with me," and again the two typewriters clicked all the faster for the intermission. During the first pause Reardon took it up again, with —

"But I should never have believed he had it in him to write like that!"

Miss Macy was phrasing a difficult sentence and made no reply.

The tea hour at the Paynes was becoming a function every afternoon. From its cosy niche by the library fire it had moved down to a formal installation in the drawing-room. Stephanie no longer made a pretense of pouring it herself and even had in an extra man to supplement the servants of the house. To-day everyone had explained his or her coming by the natural desire to be among the first to congratulate Raleigh on his success in the literary arena.

The book was not as yet out a week and had gone into a second edition. Everybody was talking about it, and more astonishing to relate, buying it. Poetry, the Nazarene art, was actually selling! Raleigh, convicted from the first, had merely smiled, and kept his own counsel.

"I always say that your enemies buy your books, but your friends borrow them," young Emmons was saying, as Raleigh entered. "Most women will spend five dollars worth of oil running the motor to a public library for a novel, instead of decently buying one. It is one of their pet forms of economy."

"I remember when Bob's book first came out, I went paying visits on every one I knew, just to see if it was on people's tables," cried a pretty little woman buried in brown furs.

"Yes, it got to be a regular game of hunt-the-book," said her husband, laughing at the recollection. "And about as successful as fox-hunting an anise seed bag in most cases, too."

"It is a material age," interrupted pretty Mrs. Maltby, quoting her husband, and well-satisfied with the platitude. She looked regretful as she said it, and drew her faultless figure up complacently to free her gown from a possible wrinkle.

Manice Brown took Raleigh's hand with marked sympathy denoting fellow feeling, though to him success for another was bitter fruit. "I have seen your little volume," he said. "You must be glad to get it out of your way. Think of me, with three of my own coming out next year!"

"Really!" interposed old Mrs. Malcomber, moving to join them, and also shaking hands with Ra-

leigh, forgetting she had already done so. "And who are your publishers?"

"I have not fully decided," he parried, as if pressed to choose. "There is something to be said for several of the best houses."

"What are the titles?" Mrs. Malcomber in pursuit was not to be evaded.

"I never definitely entitle them until they are about to appear. One's titles are so apt to be snatched away from one. One volume is to be made up of essays, and another a collection of poems on occasions chiefly historical, and the third probably a novel —"

"But they are already finished, I suppose. You said they were to appear within the year?"

"They are not written out yet, but I intend to take the summer for that. I have them all in the back of my head," he assured her jauntily.

"In contemplation, I understand you to mean?"

"It is practically the same thing," he said contentedly. "They are all done but writing."

"Ah yes, like the lives of some famous men,—all done but living," she said tersely, turning aside.

"O Mr. Payne, do come here!" begged the wife of an editor of New York's most exclusive monthly, a woman with a deep contralto voice, who was always rushing from place to place, knowing and making allowance for every one indiscriminately. "Why on earth don't you write a novel?"

"Probably because he is a poet," said Mrs. Malcomber disdainfully.

"But you seem to feel so much, it ought to make a splendid novel," continued the first speaker, regardless of interruption. "Write a serial about all the society people in New York, and hint at all you know behind the scenes. I will get it accepted. I am sure you could do it!"

"Just came in to congratulate you, Mr. Payne," Professor Gyer was saying. "I remember when my history of the Persian race was published, it also went into a second edition within a fortnight, — in cheaper form of course, for library and school use. The publishers had never had such an experience with a solid work. They were amazed, simply amazed that a work, not a work of fiction by a standard author, could have met with such a reception!"

"Who is that with Aubrey Jones?" asked Mrs. Malcomber, raising her lorgnette as two men entered the room, one a well known essayist and with him an oldish man with the undeniable absent-minded manner of the scholar.

"Mr. Payne, I want you to meet Dr. Chemung" — Aubrey Jones was saying, "I brought him in to have a look at our great American poet. He is an authority on Greek poetry himself, and with the poets as with thieves, it takes one to catch one!"

Dr. Chemung shook hands stoutly, but his eyes were almost immediately riveted on Professor Gyer. He went through his presentation to Stephanie in briefest formality. His mind was set on Gyer from the first glance. He allowed himself to be detained merely for his tea, which he took with cakes arranged in scallops round the rim of his plate, laid out on an onyx table conveniently near, as if he had found himself at a railway junction.

"When I have finished, we will talk," he promised Professor Gyer genially. "It is astonishing how England took up my exegesis of Homer"—

"It was the same story with my history of Persia"—began the Professor. And it was immediately a duet in which they were engaged, neither listening to the other, and neither offended by the other's interruption, after the manner of great and scholarly men quick with their own subject. Launched forth on criticism and counter-criticism, classicism and the true spirit of modern scholarship, they were confident of complete sympathy, and oblivious of the fact the others had drifted away and left them.

"Don't interrupt them. They are talking a 'twosome' and having a perfect time," said Christine. She was looking very handsome this winter in her velvets and monstrous picture hats. She

had been at no pains to conceal her admiration for Raleigh or his success. He established himself by her now, with the air of having waited and obtained his reward, in the re-setting of new circles that followed upon new arrivals. It was very pleasant to hear her exclamations of surprise and satisfaction, as well as her practical way of estimating results which tallied well with his own.

"All sold out again at Brentano's," she told him. "You are a wonder, Raleigh!" And perhaps deep down in her heart beneath the diamond sun-burst or the miniature of the baby set in pearls which she always wore, lurked a secret envy of the woman who had taken this paragon from her.

"What a stunning friend you are Chris!" he said impulsively.

"Am I?"

He nodded his affirmative.

"What is a friend, I wonder? It is said to be a person to whom one can talk about oneself with enjoyment. I ought to fulfil that definition, to you, Raleigh. You know how intensely I care for every step ahead you and Jim gain. You knew he was going to have the Judgeship he wanted?"

"He owes everything he is to you," Raleigh said with conviction. "A man's wife is part of himself, but it may be the part that helps or hinders."

"How very foreign looking Mrs. Payne is!" exclaimed Mrs. Morton Smythe, glancing at Ste-

phanie, and timing herself by a bracelet watch as she spoke, beside getting in her own effect in a long mirror opposite.

"Yes, perfectly pre-Raphealite, is she not?" chorused another young woman, a bride of a few weeks only. She had no idea what she meant, but the expression sounded as Mrs. Payne looked, and it was one she always used when she did not know what she really did mean herself. It was confusingly convincing to her at least.

"She is not smart, and I do not call her pretty, do you?" Mrs. Morton-Smythe continued, twitching her veil into more fetching lines.

"No," admitted the bride reluctantly, "but she always seems to have two or more men with her. Even Jack, my husband, you know, considers her interesting,—that is in a way. He sat by her at dinner somewhere and mentioned her several times afterward, though he said she was not animated or brilliant conversationally in the least."

And Stephanie,—sitting there in her soft cloud of lace, her great rings weighing down her frail hands, the hum of alien speech about her, of whom was she thinking? Of Raleigh Payne? That same Raleigh Payne, himself,—was his heart at flood-tide, his blood stirred to its depths by this newest triumph? Steven Randall alone knew their faces well enough to have hazarded a guess, and he was already back at Sky High, tired of the

town and its noise, where one remembers less easily than in the country silence of long mornings and lengthening afternoons with purple shadows on the parian landscape.

"Your own family are all literary, are they not?" Aubrey Jones was asking Mrs. Mayhew.

"Yes, I said when I married Dick, I was thankful for just one thing,—and that was that I was not marrying into my own family!" she cried. "I never dreamed of his taking up the stage, afterward."

"I married her under false colours," confessed Dick Mayhew. "She won't go to a first night of any of my plays for fear of failure or stage thunder. They seem to be her two nightmares."

Externally they were all at ease. But underneath the surface were there those hidden emotions, like strange monsters of the sea that crawl beneath placid waters? Were there jealousies and heart-burnings, uncertainties and envyings and miserable fears of the human breast? To herself, Stephanie was thinking over and over—"No one but me—no one but me—and they never will, they never, never will!"

"Bill's last novel was so shocking to the country people up near our summer place, that they treated him as if he had scarlet fever, last season," said the wife of the day's most rapid seller. "If they saw him coming into the country store, they

would carom off from the dry goods to the grocery side, and buy raisins when they had come expressly for fly netting, so not to have to talk about it! They liked Bill, but the book was too much for them."

"O Bill is not so bad as he is advertised," encouraged Dick Mayhew.

"Of course a man may write things a woman is not allowed to think in the dark," said Mrs. Malcomber tartly.

Bill's wife looked thoughtful. "I wonder if that is why, when Carrie Blair's book came out, people would not admit they had read it, though they said—"how any pure-minded woman could—and how George Blair could have let her—!"

"No pure-minded woman could do anything whatever, if women ran the world," interposed Aubrey Jones, "Carrie did what she could—"

"And far more than she ought to!" broke in Mrs. Malcomber, cutting off his sentence.

"Her husband ran away, did he not?" asked Dick Mayhew politely.

"I am sure I do not know. I assume everybody, who is anybody in society, has been up in a balloon, rolled down glaciers, killed a tiger, been divorced and committed suicide and then begin there with them. It simplifies life so," she replied. "Who is that pretty girl in the window-

seat with a man?" she asked abruptly. "She is being bored to death."

"That is improvident of her, for he is eligible to a degree," said Raleigh, overhearing her question. "He was born handicapped by his own eligibility. It is his parents' fault. He regrets it sincerely enough. It robs life of all romance and makes him a matrimonial commodity."

"The girl is Christine Trent's baby sister," continued Kenon Ward, taking her empty cup. He was himself an unimpeachable beau of sixty odd summers. Mrs. Malcomber looked again at the girl in the window-seat. "Ah, it is good to be young and pretty,—once in a while—that is,—" she added quickly.

"It is better to be old and witty," he amended seriously enough.

"But youth has its perquisites," she grumbled.

"Think so?" He followed her glance toward the young girl, who had been joined by a college boy of her own age,—“I would not go through it over again for a free seat in Trinity.”

"I admit it is a great deal of work to be young and in love. I never liked to play the dupe, but remember the perquisites!" she reminded him, as she turned away to Stephanie.

"Well, my dear, do all these flattering ladies let you get near the idol of the hour?" she asked for

the sake of opening some sort of chat with this unknown hostess.

"I am also just a temple girl," Stephanie said, with a sweet affectation of humility. "I serve the idol with the rest." The old lady covered her with her lorgnette for an instant and then swept the room with a rapid stare for further prey.

Dick Mayhew had joined Raleigh and Christine as they came forward together.

"I am glad to see you, Dick," Christine said boldly. "I think it is an immoral point of view you are working out in your last play. Temptation in business, if admitted in action, is called stealing. And the second act of such a play as yours would in reality have to be set in the Tombs. You novelists and playwrights are all writing tracts on the fine art of sin in general, upside down. I don't believe one word of your cant about the 'preaching' of the stage."

"You are all wrong and hopelessly philistine," said Mayhew pleasantly. "One should regard temptation as a gift. I know of no finer experience. A soul incapable of such enjoyment is already blunted to all moral finesse. No sensation is keener than being tempted, except the superior enjoyment of resisting it."

"Like love?" asked the dowager, again breaking in, after her own brigand fashion, upon any group that sounded interesting or racy.

"Temptation in its highest sense, is an affair of divine insight, lending a flavour to the appetite for good," Raleigh asserted positively. "It is a thing to be resisted as Dick says, but because it exists it fires animation. Death ensues to the untempted mortal, or has already occurred, for his will power has no exercise,—though his friends may not have realised it and interred his body."

"Would you call that justifiable homicide?" asked Mrs. Malcomber.

"The Catholic would," said Mayhew, "but I believe the capacity for temptation in some form proves life not extinct. I suppose you will think it strange, but I even can understand poor George hating his wife —"

"Not at all, my dear boy. Don't apologise!" cried Mrs. Malcomber. "That is nothing. I can quite imagine any man hating his wife. She is always there, in the first place. She is the incarnate inevitable!"

"She is not always,—" objected Christine. "Jim says he is going to get himself a divorce as soon as he has time, in order to see more of me."

"It might not work that way," Raleigh put in, suggestively.

"What is love good for, any way? except on the stage and in novels,—there is really no time for it!" said Mrs. Mayhew. "Come, Dick, we are shockingly late as it is."

"It has its perquisites!" Mrs. Malcomber called after them. "Don't forget the perquisites!" When almost all the rest had gone, she went back to Raleigh with a kindly handclasp, to say, "And so they have all talked about themselves and gossiped and gone. If they were not here to congratulate you, why did they come?"

"That proves nothing. Their coming showed their kind feeling. They most of them ought to have been somewhere else where they were wanted and would have been important assets to the success of some one else." He took her easily enough, not caring too much either way.

"I will tell you why they came," she contradicted. "They want to be able to say they know you,—at the next place they go. They want to quote you,—‘as Raleigh Payne said to me this afternoon,—a charming house that of his, by the way,—one meets only the most talked of and exclusive set there of course, among the younger celebrities, etc., etc.! Or, So-and-So said to me yesterday at the Paynes’,—you knew his poems had hit the public hard? His wife was that beautiful Austrian Countess—’ You are a commodity, my dear Mr. Payne. Your name is a rising social stock. You are a sort of literary and social elevator, no less real in value to the rest of them than one of those monster affairs that hoist grain out in Chicago,—though purely fictitious. Oh, success has its per-

quisites, as well as love! But are they worth while?"

"You overwhelm me," Raleigh protested. "I can only thank you for the clause relating to Mrs. Payne. The beautiful Austrian may well make me famous and envied. But you forget that I claim only the editing of the Lyrics you praise so kindly."

"I forgot your editorial pose. I refuse to call it anything but that," she said. Then, with a glance toward Stephanie through her lorgnette, she shook her head. "Mrs. Payne looks fagged. You should take her away at once. What can all this sort of thing mean to her?" she said with a real flash of kindness toward them both.

"I mean to, almost at once," he replied, thanking her with a smile of sincere recognition. At the door when she was leaving, she paused an instant to again wave her lorgnette at him across the room. "Do not forget the perquisites!" she called back at him. "Those of love are worth while!"

When they were entirely alone, Raleigh went swiftly upstairs two steps at a time.

"Sorry to have kept you so long over your hours, Reardon," he began. "Now for the letter you spoke of. You may copy and forward the second one: the one accepting. I have considered it at length and see nothing to be gained by hold-

ing my decision longer. Get it off on your way home, will you? Good-night!"

"Good-night, Mr. Payne," Reardon replied, and automatically took the cover from the typewriter and laid out his copy. Raleigh heard the noise of the keys before he was at the stairway. When he heard the thing actually in progress he was glad it was beyond recall.

CHAPTER X

ON THE PILLOW OF DOUBT

IT was the third time Steven Randall had read over the same letter. It had surprised him the first time, gone deeper and startled him the second, and now settled down on him as a heaviness of spirit dimly defined but definitely wrong.

The crested monogrammed paper was of Raleigh's household, and the writing that of Stephanie. What did it mean?

Cher Grandee:

Will you be again so gracious as to permit me to come and espouse poverty, chastity and agriculture with you? It is sad without me, in your solitude,—yes? And I should be entirely happy to find myself once more by your side. The life here is too much for me and the Mari speaks of going soon to Europe. And since I lack the inclination to accompany him, will you permit me to remain with you while he is en voyage, as before? I promise to do all my possible not to be a care. Write that I may come —

Your very devoted,

STEPHANIE.

I wish not to go, you understand. It has been discussed between us and I will not go. I shall remain. It is decided.

What was the trouble? To Grandee it was inexplicable. For Stephanie not to wish to go back to Europe might be a caprice to punish Raleigh, but to deliberately leave her husband in the New York establishment was more. Something was wrong. He wired her his hospitality at once, and she came up the next day with many trunks and without her maid, declaring herself prepared to make no trouble and be a consolation in his solitude only. That something had happened, and that it was a relief to her to be alone with him was apparent. There was something that was impalpably with them,—something that hovered and relented and peered forth again when it had all but faded away. Randall ranged himself on the woman's side, ignorant. He despaired of anything that could break through her fine acting, yet he was sure it was acting and kept up with effort through their long solitary days and evenings. She was never strong and the severe winter had played havoc with her health. She was gay and depressed by turns, and sat playing chess with him hours at a time without speaking. The spring seemed never to be coming. Joel Underwood never met her pacing up and down the icy terrace, without prognosticating the utter destruction of his early crocuses and hyacinths, pursing up his mouth sourly as if having foreseen trouble was his only satisfaction. Sometimes he stopped her to ex-

change a few amenities as to "foreign parts," which were his secret mania, and about which he read every book he could get hold of. It was a concession to her, which she accepted as a high compliment, when he opened his remarks one morning by saying:

"Speaking of furrin' parts, Mrs. Payne, I have seen some furriners I liked about as well as Americans."

"I am very happy to hear you say so, Joel, most Americans are not so generous," she replied, drawing her fur closer about her against the curdling wind.

"It must be lonesome, over there," he continued reflectively —

And in Stephanie's imagination the other side of the picture presented itself, as she saw again by inner vision the thronging Ringstrasse, of Vienna, where the pace of the horses is as mad as the crowd on the promenade is leisurely; the flying motors of France,—the idlers in the cafés of the Bois, the riviera flutter and fascination — The world called her in various tongues and many-coloured pleasures as the old gardener waited, and then brought her back to the present by another semi-inference,—“I suppose you may have seen a crowned head. That's what I want to do, next to seeing a few battle fields. Not but that we will have dead remains enough lying right round here,

if this keeps up,"—he promised, his one eye detecting more possibilities of winter-killed beauty without looking at it, than the co-operating pair of better endowed mortals. She was so sweet and patient with them all, Randall felt, from the nature of the case, her difference with her husband must have been Raleigh's fault. That she was deep, capable of going far below the surface and staying down a long time, he admitted to himself repeatedly. She never spoke unguardedly or in any way that reflected upon Raleigh unpleasantly. If she had sometimes made a little fling in a careless way, or some little feminine sarcasm at the expense of men in general, he could easily have forgiven her. But she gave him no occasion. The man who watched her so carefully would have been more at ease if she had turned, in a sudden spasm of anger, and confessed:

"I hate him, Grandee! How I hate him!"

It seemed to him that she was either subdued by her dependence upon a man whom she disliked and wished to separate herself from, or that she was smarting under his indifference and trying to coerce him by her own silence. At times he thought she seemed afraid of Raleigh and again she acted independently of his wishes,—as in this instance of thwarting his summer plans, which argued her mistress of whatever unexplained situation lay between them. To Grandee she seemed to be think-

ing, always thinking about something that she did not quite solve. When he spoke to her, she answered as if he, and not the absorbing thought, was the unreality. And he studied her fondly over his reviews and newspapers, as they sat by the fire after dinner, while she read the *Matin* and *L'Illustration* he had ordered sent to her from Paris, with her head propped up on her frail hand, jewelled as always.

And so day by day they lived toward the golden hope of springtide, and one by one the tulips pricked up and turned their eager cups for the sun's overflowing, and the hyacinths, like stiff-skirted shepherdesses of Arcady, were fondled by bees that jostled each other in their fumbling galantries to be first and longest at their honeyed cups. And only Joel unappeased by banks of fragrance and colour, grumbled at portentous signs of the ravaging elm beetle, and prophesied complete destruction if all the trees were not sprayed at once. Only Raleigh's "furrin'" wife diverted him somewhat from his acrid satisfaction in the general doom of Nature. He found in her an opportunity to study a new type of flower at hand, hitherto only recognisable in bedizened catalogues that were nefarious in the false expectations they aroused. At least, that was the way he represented his interest in her to his own understanding. He studied her by indirections, exaggerated

by his visual dissent, and edged into conversation with her as often as he could induce the impression that he, not she, was being led to talk against his will and better judgment, and so without loss of dignity or circumspection. He expected little of her and generously ignored her right to amount to much—"considering." Which last word was with him the pith of many a prejudice and the end of many an argument, leaving the matter open to be again narrowly followed up as he saw fit. He never let her observe how faithfully he tended the flowers she preferred, or how rigidly he kept watch over her own flittings in and out his imperilled borders. He was, however, none the less aghast when her clear voice broke in upon the midst of one of his worm-eaten meditations, with her sweet friendliness of interest:

"Tell me something about your wife, Joel. I hear she too is a Papist." He was lining a curved path and he straightened up stiffly, while his dissenting eyes disputed the right of first denial to so preposterous a fallacy.

"Whoever said that must have got a blow on his head"—he remarked impersonally.

"It was Grandee, Mr. Randall, I mean," she hastened to say, feeling she had made a mistake.

"Maybe he did, and maybe he didn't"—Joel qualified, "but he knew better, if he did."

"But yes, certainly, he said to me that word,—

it sounded as if he did"—she added apologetically. "It is nothing bad to be one. I, myself, am one you remember."

"She is a Baptist, that is what she is," Joel stated, to whom it might concern.

"A Baptist," she repeated gently. "Tell me, please, what is a Baptist, Joel?"

"Whatever it is, it is a long way from a Papist," abbreviating his definition for good reasons of his own.

"And you are one of those, also, or are you of Mr. Randall's faith?" she asked, trying to atone for her unintentional failure in respect.

"There is only one variety of religion in my family. That is enough for any respectable household. I would not let a member of my family go off and get a strange religion, any more than I would go off and get another strange wife!"

He verified his straight edge of the flower bed he was cutting, with a long tort string, and as he walked away from her, he added, as if he had at the same time laid righteousness to the plumb, "It would be better if others felt the same. There's no good to come out of a different hope of heaven and hell in the same family. It works against Nature." And Stephanie withdrew, feeling convicted of spiritual misdemeanour, without having the least conception of wherein she had erred. She was unaffectedly anxious to be gracious to all about her,

in spite of an increasing sense of her isolation from them by their distrust of anything unfamiliar and not compliant with their own established order. There is no denying that Society is a play for which no part can be learned beforehand. One finds oneself upon the stage unaware if one has been cast by the higher powers for a heroic rôle, or one of sheer comedy to amuse the idle onlooker. One may be letter-perfect in Juliet and find oneself cast for Sans Gêne, look the part of a seductive Phedre, and find the exigence of the moment demanding the brains of a Portia to determine a path out of life's relentless labyrinth. In this respect the woman of society transcends the actress-by-trade, however consummate,—in her adaptation to the demand of the totally unexpected.

Stephanie felt herself cast for the ghost of herself in these hours that followed each other like Emerson's muffled dervishes. The spring mornings broke to no rapture but Nature's elemental passion, and the lengthening days given for joy and youth, led back to evenings of impersonal fulfillment.

What is monotony to others, is to one who loves, dearness. Each simple successive beauty here might have stood for a continuing pledge of love to love. To her, they were a dreary mockery. She flitted about the terraces and tried to interest herself in the garden, where Joel bore her experi-

ments until she planted a row of dahlias upside down.

"As if there wa'nt enough to contend with, without planting bulbs for China!" he grumbled when Grandee begged him to reverse the performance and say nothing to Mrs. Payne about it.

"It does seem as if Providence 'worked in a mysterious way' to pester me in that garden, without planting upside down!" he repeated; his grievance leaking like vinegar from his thin, determined lips. "Have you noticed the brown leaves curled up on the rosydendrons? If one goes, they'll all go! I can't have her, nor any woman, deviling round on these terraces. If she wants to dig, let her dig down in the kitchen garden where it won't show." Fortunately her interest in Eve's avocation wasted, and she turned to the piano for companionship, but finding in it a device to set her nerves racing, was wise enough to hold herself with a tight curb and turn back to the outer world.

"If there was a fountain, Grandee,—why is there not a fountain?" she asked wistfully. "It would be like a little sister to play with, dancing away out there when you are resting or reading your ponderous works on impossible subjects. I should never feel alone if there was alive water near me."

"Fountains belong in artificial gardens," he told her. "They are feminine; like all running water,

they prattle all they know,—the gossips! I won't have them in an honest bachelor's paradise!"

"I know,—and the ghosts walk beside them too," she said quickly. "Sad little ghosts also, for the ghosts are always saddest in any place they have been once happiest, you know, Grandee."

And all the time she was wondering if Raleigh had been told yet? Did he know that she knew? Had some one at the story's end spoken her name,—"You knew who the woman was?" And then it would be all over in an instant.

As the season advanced she absolutely declined being included in the summer colony. She made no allusion to her retirement, but to Christine urging all sorts of festivities upon her, reiterated unwaveringly:

"Grandee is not strong. He likes to have me with him."

If she had her reasons for preferring to be away from Raleigh, she was beyond criticism in the manner she employed her seclusion. To outsiders this perhaps but increased her charm. Many a weekend guest implored his hostess to produce this foreign-looking being to grace the more or less dull Sunday dinner table. And not a little brazen finesse of the American brand was employed to net this unavailable butterfly that hovered tantalisingly out of reach.

"I do not like to leave Grandee," Stephanie said

gently over and over again, as if her excuse was also her subtle extenuation of being at Sky High at all.

"Just use me either way, for or against," Grandee said, amused to serve as social buffer. "If you don't want to accept, say I am at death's door. If anything you care to do comes up, I will recover, and be able to be left."

But when she carried it so far that even he deserted her, and added his importunity to the rest, she was ready with still another soft evasion:

"I do not find it natural to go into the world, in the absence of my husband."

Here she intrenched herself. She was never seen in church, being a Catholic, so her legend grew, as such legends will in a country place full of idlers, all so closely resembling each other as to hail any variety, and resent its insinuation of superiority. To Grandee she seemed rather to be protecting herself from a hint of scandal, than refraining from diversion from natural instinct, or an absorbing passion for the absent husband.

One chilly April afternoon, when she had been wandering through the wet woods, she lost her bearings and came out upon a pair of bars at the edge of a steep ravine. It was dusk already, as she stood undecided how to go on. Suddenly, a lighted train shot past her in the cut below. She caught her breath.—already she heard it whistling

for the crossing half a mile below. It meant Life! She knew, by the quick spasm at her heart, she should come again at this hour and watch for the thrill, quick with the beat of the great world. A relation was instantly established, through this medium, with the passioning night-life of cities and the troubling call of the Away!

So spring passed out into June with its wasted wealth of roses and its vain moonlight, while Grandee pondered his momentous moves at chess, or she read aloud to him in her voice whose conventual intonation went oddly enough with the editorial page of a New York paper. And one evening as she returned from her tryst with the lighted train in the cut, she heard some one on the highway, the other side of the wall whistling — “Behüt dich Gott!” and she listened till it trailed off in the distance, wondering who the local Trumpeter might be, and why he chose that particular song.

It was on a rainy afternoon before the longest day, when the peonies and Carmencita poppies looked like dishevelled revellers after a bal masque, their tissue dominoes lying at their feet, that Christine’s stable boy appeared at Sky High with a note marked urgent, begging Stephanie to come over for tea. Just why Stephanie assumed her to be alone, if mere assumption it was, perhaps she herself could not have satisfac-

torily explained. Grandee, on the face of it, was for once on her side too,—or the side she had led him to suppose was continuedly hers. He began at once inventing excuses for her with unusual ingenuity.

“Make the calamity that prevents you, public or private, as you like,” he offered recklessly. “Anything except having died in the night, I will live up to.”

“She is really too amiable. Probably I ought to accept,” Stephanie said slowly.

“Not if you do not want to,” Grandee protested. “What right has Christine to order you up?”

“But, yes, probably Raleigh would not wish me to always refuse her.”

“I would not go a step if I did not feel like it!”

“It is not a question of what I feel. It is not that I feel like it, or that I feel any inclination at all, to go or not to go.”

“Well, go then, I would!” he urged half-heartedly.

“Not if you will miss me!” detecting his hypocrisy. “Shall you miss me, Grandee?”

“Always!”

“Even for an hour?”

“Even for a quarter of an hour!”

But she went. It was drizzling and chilly and she was driven down under the drenched trees,

with the hood drawn up over the Victoria, so that she saw only the buttons on the back of the coachman's coat, and got out at Christine's expecting to be taken upstairs at once.

But there were voices in the library. There was a bright birch fire and Christine sat by the tea table; at her feet, on a red cushion, graceful in spite of his unusual height, Archie Newbold, the portrait painter. Jim Trent was mixing some sort of a hot concoction, the empty glasses in a row on the mantel above him waiting to be filled. A stranger was reading aloud, standing by the window to catch the fading light, and on the great divan sat a girl she had never seen and another strange man.

Stephanie saw at a glance round the low-studded room with its atmosphere so pronouncedly "in-time," that the situation was the one she most objected to, an American "informal" occasion. One of those indefinable miscellaneous affairs in which she never felt herself at ease.

She wore a plain black frock with no other ornament than a long emerald chain and silver crucifix; a close silver collar with an emerald clasp round her throat. Her exaggerated black hat was veiled, for which she was grateful, and the thick meshes, together with the drooping brim gave her a slight sense of ambush, as they all turned toward her at once. Her mouth remained proud and un-

smiling, and from her smart heels to her crouching plumes, she was, and knew she was, utterly out of drawing with the whole setting and the group within.

"Ah, we have caught you!" cried Christine merrily. "We have got her at last! Come, Nina, and be presented to Mrs. Raleigh Payne."

The girl rather reluctantly left the divan, with a glance at the man beside her, as if commanding him to remain standing where he was until her return. Newbold drew himself to his feet and covered her with a critical squint, that saw and judged her artistic values at every point. Jim Trent thrust a glass in her hand saying, "Try it! You will find it better than tea." The man who was reading, becoming aware of an interruption, stopped, looking little less than annoyed.

"I believed that I should find you quite alone," Stephanie began, when the introductions were over. She attempted conversation with the girl first, a pretty, inconsequent thing, who announced herself as hating Europe, having been dragged over it three times by a father who wanted to be able to say he had been there, and seen it, no matter what came up.

She got back to her original position on the divan by her first partner as soon as it was feasible.

The reading man, Remmington by name, took his turn next, asking her a few leading questions,

much as one would interview a reformed Esquimaux, or some caged phenomenon, a fallen star perhaps, or any stray wanderer from its native sphere.

Did she think Americans exaggerated, as they were said to?

Not too much, a little perhaps.

Did she think the American women were spoiled?

No, on the contrary, the men.

Did she like America?

Oh, undoubtedly!

Newbold was waiting. He was from the South and the only one in the room who in the least shared her attitude of an alien, in his silent scorn of everything north of Dixie, which all the hall-marked F. F. V.s carry about with them, unexpressed but never inexpressive. He let Jim Trent, Christine's sister and even Christine herself second Remington's efforts. Each took a turn at the elegant art of manœuvring conversation by interrogation out of a reserved mortal with no idea of showing her hand, before he quietly took the low chair next her. He leaned his head contentedly back upon the cushions and looked at her with due appreciation. It was bound to be a deadlock at first, for both knew relief was at hand and neither cared to hurry the pleasant certainty. His eyes, odd eyes that did not often meet one's own, continued to approve. His first instant admission of her charm

was momentarily heightening. The others, glad to be rid of the responsibility of her diversion, fell to easier topics and cheerful chaffing, leaving them to themselves. The meeting of every new man and woman creates the possibility of the door of a new Eden swinging open. Of this these two, being cosmopolitans of emotion as well as life, were perfectly aware.

He did not ask her if she liked America or American men. And he did call the little tea cakes he offered her "Madeleines," then when she glanced up quickly at the happy association of the name, his odd eyes were responsive, though he dropped them almost at once as he said earnestly,—with that equally familiar seriousness of the French in trivialities:

"Don't you love the kind they have at the corner of the Rue Olivier?"

Like a fish coming to the surface at the shadow of a fly she rose to his innocent bait. Without lifting her veil she gave unveiled consent to forgetfulness of surroundings in the joy of re-hearing those intimately remembered names in his easy drawl that differed so from their American pronunciation.

"To think that it should sound like music to hear one say again even *La Cascade*, *Les Ambassadeurs*, *Arminoville*!" she cried.

"It is like reading over a wine card to hear you

repeat them after me," he assured her, with his indolent smile.

"No, I am very serious in my desire to hear you,—if it is only to say over the railway stations from Paris to Marseilles,—Begin, please, at Dijon."

"I can even say *Folie Bergère*, *Auteuille* and the *Belle-Manière*," he told her, amused by her fervour. "Every Parisian knows the beautiful Alsace with her native head-dress and satin gown, who was once the Mistress of Boulanger, and is now mistress of the art of fried sole 'avec sauce tartare' and 'Faisan d'Artignan'!"

From cafés they went to theatres, acting, music,—he always leading.

"I am content that you love the French songs best," she said, to lead him on to an expression of his taste hitherto undeclared, for her own reasons.

"I have not said that I did, but I do. I am surprised that you do not insist upon the German music. Most women seem to feel they must. They talk a lot of rubbish about the purity of German sentiment," he ventured.

"Eh, bien, one prefers one's husband to like the German songs best,—it reveals those qualities that make a good husband,—does it not? But me, myself I prefer French."

"Yes, I know. The un-nerving kind," he suggested.

"But there are those equally beautiful in German, par example in the Trompeter von Sackingen. Do you recall the farewell? It is called the nursemaid's song in Austria. It is so popular as to have become vulgar, even."

He shook his head. "I have no ear for music. I should not remember it if I had heard it."

"In Vienna you would hear it until you could never forget."

"Alas! Vienna I have yet to see," he admitted, regretting it sincerely with an impatient sigh.

"It is much better, Monsieur Newbold! If you had, our meeting to-day would have been quite a scandal. To encounter one from Vienna to-day would be to embrace it!" And gay as guard-mount she began to talk to him, with strange little dusks of melancholy sadness in between, as she had not talked for months,—years perhaps.

He found her too delightful to share and monopolised unblushingly. The carriage surprised her as much as it did him. It had been a short hour to both.

"I shall swear I have been to Vienna and just come back, next time we meet!" he told her, as Jim Trent interrupting them, brought up the man hitherto in the background sitting by Christine's sister on the divan.

"I do not want you to go away, Mrs. Payne,

without meeting my brother,—my amusing little brother Lawrence Trent.”

Stephanie bowed formally without rising. Something impelled her to lift her eyes and she started slightly.

“If I knew you and loved you I should call you Gaston,” she said with a sudden daring recklessness, putting out her hand to meet his own.

“Please begin now,” he begged. “Begin right where you left off with him! You are so difficult to meet I am sure there is not going to be any future tense to anticipate. I won out by betting you would not come to-day,—but I shall never hope to win on it again, even if I change sides.”

“So, then, this was a trap?” she asked, colouring with annoyance.

“Well, of course one always wants to meet the people one cannot, and nobody could seem to get at you. And Newbold and I have dragged Remington up here to work this summer, so we are really neighbours, in the country sense. We have taken the Squirrel’s Nest, you know, on the ridge next below Sky High. We are really tenantry of Mr. Randall’s and just outside his walls.”

“You must have a very beautiful panorama of the hills,” she said conventionally.

“Oh, heavens! Do you do that too?” he protested.

“Do what?”

"Talk about the purple hills, the hyacinthine hills? Everybody does it here. It gets on my nerves unbearably. Remmington has to,—he is a poet in streaks, and Chris is a nature fiend, and Newbold makes his living in colour, of course. But I never dreamed you would!"

"You are the only person I have met who was not a lover of Nature." She was incredulous of the fact still.

"I said I did not like to talk about it," he corrected. "Everything has been said there is to say, and it is time to return from Nature to the new and glorified eighteenth century, still keeping the passion of the past. You ought to see the expression on all these benighted faces when I talk disrespectfully of the blue-throated bat-wing or the yellow-bellied grossbeak!"

"I believe that I know the effect you mean,"—she confessed. "I am always full of regret that I am not able to talk with the same sentiment of the hills as Christine and Mr. Randall."

"When they begin it before me I always whistle the Mendelssohn spring song. That is my antidote for sentimentality. It out-banals banality!"

"If you are not devoted to the country, why do you place yourself here?"

Her question implied her old feeling that a man followed his inclination in all things.

"Oh, the country is good for some things, though it is not good for the same thing to all people. I am working here this summer. I am a hermit and hate society and the haunts of men,—especially women."

"Men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie," Newbold chimed in.

The re-appearance of the pretty Nina, with the baby over her shoulder, here created a diversion. In all probability the effect she intended. Christine held out her arms but Remmington captured the prize and tended it skilfully, crossing his foot so high in the process, that baby Lucile played happily with it as a monster toy. There was no pose about it. He liked children and was used to them. The tableau lacked all appeal to the imagination or sentiment. He looked like an illustration from the *Cotter's Saturday night*, no more no less. There is no such test of a man's delicacy and charm as his way with a child. Newbold refused the honour outright. He did not care for children in their uncertain states. Jim's brother mused the little creature as he passed her like a choice bundle over to Christine, but a queer little jerk contracted Stephanie's heart as she saw him do it. There had been a supernatural sweetness on his cynical young face of a duration swifter than the passing of a shadow across moving water. It threw the temptation of Saint Anthony upon the

screen of her fancy for an unappreciable instant and was gone.

"Did I handle that emergency successfully?" he asked her.

"You should adopt the profession of the Madonna," she assured him gravely.

They all took her to the carriage. She did not utter the hope of seeing any one of them again. They stared at each other when the carriage disappeared into the soft misty darkness and then they laughed.

Young Trent took up Newbold's wager, and went the next day, it being Sunday, to pay a call, but was informed that Mrs. Payne was not at home.

Stephanie watched his irate back and stiffly conscious shoulders down the driveway with some amusement. He was young of course, and Jim Trent's brother after all. There could have been no objection to her receiving him. She wondered if it was Mr. Remmington or the younger Trent who whistled "*Behüt dich Gott!*" outside the high wall of Sky High, as she returned from her customary promenades. It could not be Newbold, so it must be one or the other. She insisted to herself that it must have been Remmington, because she so distinctly preferred it to have been Trent,—after the manner of women and paradox. And then with redoubled force the paralysing question

returned,—from which the diversion of the afternoon had temporarily set her free,—did Raleigh know that she knew? Had any one yet supplied the name of that woman Nicholas Heathleagh loved?

For like her famous predecessor, Stephanie “could not slumber tranquilly upon the pillow of doubt.”

CHAPTER XI

A COMMENTARY IN CARDS

ASIDE from an occasional sharp reprimand from Joel Underwood for picking buds with the roses, Stephanie's days went on as before.

"Mr. Randall don't like it that the heliotrope don't cover the terrace wall by now, as 'tis," he reiterated to her. "I see he was on the ramparts about it yesterday. Right up on the ramparts!" he repeated, meaning rampage she assumed, from Grandee's explanation of Joel's use of the word.

Stephanie had innocently supposed flowers, like love, were more abundant for more love. She attempted to exonerate herself with Joel in vain on any such excuse.

"Gardening's just one damn bug after another," — was his private adaptation of the popular conception of life in general. "And heliotrope is the one flower that can't bear to be picked at all. I wish't you'd try to hold your horses, Mrs. Payne, until the 'excursiums' are in bloom. They have got to be picked, to head 'em off from going to seed!"

He left her wondering on the differing natures

of flowers. They were not so unlike women then, — some of them had to be taken, and others left to grow by themselves.

She had grown wakeful of late, pondering her imperative question, and often heard the hurrying trains between midnight and dawn. There was one freight that came along about two o'clock, so heavily loaded that it raced down the steep grade toward the junction, echoing like the heels of a galloping Centaur, and shrieking strange un-human cadenzas that she imagined not unlike the possible cry of those wild and wholly rapturous pagan creatures. It gave her an odd sense of comradeship in the dead of night when only the night-jar was awake, heightening the desolation with its uncanny echo.

She often strolled toward the ravine where the train slid away, down the whirling current of life beneath her, and one evening returning, she deliberately waited and peered cautiously through the trees where the wall was low, to discover that it was Jim Trent's little brother, not the artist Newbold or the poet Remmington, who whistled "Behüt dich Gott!" on the highway.

He had never called again since that first unsuccessful attempt, and now July was all but with her. All day long the Bruno-hearted bees, exponents of a higher Pantheism than any Pater ever exploited, were reckless in adoption of any or all sweets for

their own. The velvet-veined butterflies hung in sultry swoons on noon-tide blossoms widely flaring, and the scarlet Tanager, free from the cares of a first brood, flashed like a sin of scarlet unforgiven!

It was Stephanie's turn then to be surprised, when Steven Randall, with many apologies for deserting her, accepted an invitation to dinner at the Squirrel's Nest. It was really deserted on the terrace after her solitary meal was over, with only the whip-poor-wills' incessant lashing of the silence about her.

Over at the Bachelor's mess it was gay enough to make up. Dinner well over, and an astonishingly varied amount of discussion roused, and personal opinion exchanged, they had settled down to whist. Remmington was dealing in a crisp incisive manner of his own,—that manner of perfection in detail often noticeable in one whose absorbing interest is far withdrawn. It was also the manner of a man who plays to win, no matter what the nature of the game.

"You remind me of my nephew, Raleigh Payne," Randall said, picking up his cards. He was the only one not smoking, but hugely enjoying the vicarious forbidden fruit by inhalation. "Raleigh plays to win, just as you do, life or cards,—as it happens. I have got to the point where I look on in life very much as I do at a

hand of cards. I never saw a run of spades just like that last of yours,—by the way,—I remember seeing a run of hearts to match it, barring the queen, out in San Francisco. It is the same way in life, any unusual combination interests and attracts me, whether it is for or against me.”

“It is only when you do not care a picayune that things come your way,” said Newbold, ready to play.

“I suppose that is what the ‘Methody parson’ means when he talks about ‘losing your life to find it,’” suggested Trent audaciously.

Randall smiled quizzically. “Not to men of my nephew’s stamp,” he objected, “and they never lead from a finesse.”

In the next interval between deals Newbold recurred to Raleigh Payne.

“He looks like a portrait of his own ancestors. I admire his aristocracy of feature immensely,” he said.

“I never saw a man so bent on forcing events to shape to his will,” Randall remarked, sorting his cards as he spoke. “He would back himself against any combination of cards or luck and bet his last dollar on himself!”

“I like that,” cried Remmington. “It is heroic.”

“Oh, well, the luck is bound to run about so long one way, but when it turns,—it turns. I al-

ways play as the cards fall,—at my age one does. Life and the game are a good deal alike by that time. When I lose, holding good cards, or win unexpectedly through my partner or good playing of my mediocre ones, or the reverse, with all or nothing against me, it is largely subjective after all. It is a great thing to enjoy the science of playing for observation, I mean. To watch the cards as they drop for or against one,—to play for the game's sake, not merely to come out ahead. Why, when you have won the fun is over! It takes years and all sorts of experience to produce such a result, and you youngsters are probably pitying me for the dreariness of such a negative point of view, but life is interesting to me,—as an on-looker,—perhaps more acutely interesting to me, in spite of my years, than it ever was!”

“Place pour le Vieux!” cried Newbold gallantly.

“Yes, I note phenomena. I have ceased to expect miracles,” he concluded, as if to himself, glancing at his hand again to confirm his principle.

“That is odd, for nothing else ever really happens,” interposed Lawrence Trent. “They are the only things I do really believe in or count upon.”

It was Newbold who asked in the next interlude of the game,—“Where is Mr. Payne now?”

"In the Balkans briefly. He will not be long over, this time, in all probability."

"The Reviews say that the poems he pretends to have merely edited, revealed such an intimate sense of the inner nature of those people out there, that he can have anything he wants in the line of re-appointment," said Remmington.

"Yes, Raleigh is thoroughly at home on the watershed where European civilisation flows back from Tartar instinct," Randall replied. "He is climbing up a crater to look in, where the smouldering passions of the East and West are seething."

"What does Mrs. Payne think of the lyrics?" Newbold interrupted. "People say he wrote them himself, to her. She must hate waiting here alone all summer —"

Steven Randall considered briefly, or he might simply have been struck by some unusual combination in his cards,—when he spoke, he answered only the first half the conversational lead.

"It is curious, now you speak of it, I do not remember hearing Mrs. Payne say what she thought of the lyrics. If she understands them in English, I can imagine though."

"They are pretty hot, for America"—Newbold said, implying more.

"Yes, and they are truly great," Randall assented with entire unconcern. "And in great men,

Mr. Newbold, you will almost always find a strain of coarseness. It is the inherent male in them. Little women, that is mediocre, aenemic, unvaliant women shrink from it or pretend they do not see it. The great red-hearted lower class takes it for granted and puts it to Nature's purpose. The superlative woman, great enough in herself to transcend class and code for elemental reality, accepts it unashamed. George Sand did, so have notable and honourable exceptions in every land and epoch. A great woman recognises it for what it is,—the necessary alloy to hold the most precious human ore together. She glories in it, in the man supreme, without being herself less fine in fibre for its life-giving contact."

"Mrs. Raleigh Payne would, in spite of her exquisite delicacy," Trent was about to say, but stopped himself in time.

"That detracts from one's preconceived ideal of a poet," persisted Newbold.

"Perhaps, but not from the man himself. I went looking for an all-round ideal when I was younger. Now I take men as I find them,—and I find them good. If you demand their best, you will usually get it,—that is if you do your best to deserve it."

"Make it spades," interrupted Remmington.

When the game was again halted, Newbold made one more return to his enthusiasm for the

picturesque possibilities of Raleigh Payne. "It would be tremendously interesting to paint him,—that is if he would stay in focus. He has such an overwhelming personality it would be almost impossible to get him on any canvas," he deliberated, with his head a bit on one side, as if making the actual attempt.

"He is just as good at business as these more sensational effects," said Randall. "His business career sounds like a gamble, or would if he was not the soul of honour. He was in debt some three or four hundred thousand a year ago. His income to-day is less than four thousand and he is spending from fifteen to twenty. He knows it is coming round all right. His capital is most of it invested dead, but it is safe enough. He owns more than a million that he made honestly himself and he never borrows on any security but his own name. Men are glad to oblige him. He says himself, the secret of it is that he never keeps any one waiting. He is three days ahead with his interest, always. That is one secret of his success. He takes chances, of course, but not until he has insured his own stake every time. Last year he had the Catholic vote against him, but they failed to down him. Men trusted him on his record, though he was a heretic, and his own party almost distrusted him for that same reason. But it all turned in to Raleigh's account, both ways. His

character was unassailable even under cross fire. The Vinxton Trust investigations were on at the same time too. But his luck held and he caught up. He sold a block on the East side, he had offered for sixty thousand, for a hundred. And a piece of vacant property up town for a hundred, that his own agent had been trying to get forty for,—and so on. He owns to-day more than a thousand acres of timberland, up in Northern Michigan, that may burn up any windy night, but it won't because it is his. He keeps steady too and never goes into a pocket thinking it is a tunnel!" Trent yawned politely. It was frankly not Mr. Payne who interested him.

"Men have all sorts of complications to face," Randall resumed. "Raleigh has to look out for the Catholic vote and influence."

"He is a big figure in the government race, already," said Newbold admiringly. "I have heard him mentioned for the very highest prizes. He stands alone superbly."

"I sometimes think he is too self-reliant," Randall qualified. "There is such a thing as playing one's own game to the death of one's partners."

"A game does imply more than one," Trent inserted.

"Still, there are situations in which a man dare not be over-scrupulous," admitted Newbold, who was not incorruptible.

"Oh, three scruples make a damn in almost any case," scoffed Trent, wondering what part Mrs. Payne was assigned in her husband's spectacular career, and playing so indifferently that it lost him the score, and roused Steven Randall to the unwonted lateness of the hour and his waiting horses outside.

He had thoroughly enjoyed the evening. He made them feel it in his hearty invitation to come and stir him up in his retirement. His hospitality was tinged with a certain distinct consciousness of what it conferred, impressing a recognised obligation upon whoever might accept the gracious urgency of his proffered open hand and door.

Lawrence Trent came first,—to share coffee and liqueur after dinner and try his skill at chess. Newbold established himself by his indolent but surprising knowledge of foreign affairs, delightful to an old campaigner of Randall's type. Remington chiefly stopped away and received the comments of his friends upon Sky High and its occupants.

Newbold extolled the brand of cigars offered there and appreciated the wine. Trent went into mock ecstasies over the cook, and raved, as long as either would listen to him, over Mrs. Raleigh Payne. He swore he had always suspected such women to exist, but had grown weary of their

pursuit, and let them go as mere adornment of fiction. He ground his teeth openly over the existence of the paragon absentee-landlord and vowed he would cause prayers to be said that his ship might go to the mermaids on its return sailing. And his friends, who knew him best, could not quite be sure whether he covered his shameless satisfaction in Steven Randall's perfect dinners by ardent professions of devotion to his niece-by-marriage, or whether the reverse was nearer to his programme.

And Christine, noting the turn in the weather-cock, sent off for less foolish youths to play with pretty Nina, who for her part wore more and more elaborate toilets to each successive garden party, in hope of extinguishing her rival; who never appeared in person, but whose absent-presence seemed to inexorably linger in the atmosphere of the three most desirable men of the summer. To Christine's cottage they went politely, when invited, three strong, conventionally attired, and made themselves collectively and universally charming; leaving together before eleven. But Sky High they soon pervaded, "each in his separate star." Hours and customs were secondary, save for dinner, when after the fashion set by their host, the proper recognition as to coats was understood as unwritten law entirely binding and perfunctory.

They preserved the tradition among themselves that they never saw Stephanie alone. The first suspicion of unfair play was roused one night, never to be quite laid again, when Remmington asked without any connection whatever,—“Why don’t you talk about Mrs. Payne any more, Trent? Don’t you like her any more? Or do you like her too well?”

“How can I love thee, love, too well, until I know thee more?” had been his instant paraphrase; admitted by his listeners to be intentionally evasive. It was Remmington who whistled the “Spring Song” now, out of tune and key, but baldly derisive.

Lawrence Trent’s own first discomfort was in discovering that he always knew if she moved, and what she said,—in any given combination of people or circumstances. He had all but displayed irritation, on several occasions, when she had lowered her voice so that he missed parts of sentences while supposed to be engaged in his own end of the situation,—serving tea or chatting with Christine, or setting up theories for Steven Randall to knock down, which was his favourite method of slipping responsibility in conversation, and eluding detection.

He was not pleased to find himself so supernaturally aware, and noted it as check-worthy. Stephanie had loaned him her copy of Prudhomme’s

poems and he had carried his idolised Pater and laid at her feet. It was a blind offering of course, since without his interpreting voice it meant little to her. After a time he read to her, but at the most distant hint of sentiment in any author, his lips would round over the "*frühlingslied*," which she came to detest as the synonym for ridicule of all that approached romance.

"A sense of humour is utterly incompatible with sentimentality, thank God!" was his oft repeated cry. In this she found herself unresponsive. She had never met a male creature with so unaffected a horror of all expression of sentiment, yet never one who lived on his emotions so openly, and took whatever he found in his path that could increase the vibration his nerves demanded for their pleasure. Like Pater himself, indeed, he was sensuous, but without sentiment. Of the three he was the vagrant; unreliable and utterly unsatisfactory if one depended upon him. He rarely came when invited, never if his presence was really important to their plans for the table or happiness of others. Never if he could get out of it decently, when there were to be other guests. When Newbold flattered Stephanie, which was his customary phrase with all women, and her natural tribute from all men, Trent looked his contempt of women who live on such pabulum, as if it was beyond all conception or recall; blaming her for the

baseness of the performance, without for a moment aspersing his friend, by whom he swore unservedly.

The first time Stephanie found herself alone with him, on the terrace one evening, he asked her abruptly—"Why do you talk so fast to me, now? You are like a champagne bottle with the cork out!" His hands expressed his sense of brilliant effervescence and he made a pretty feint of being dazzled, by dropping his lashes to shield his eyes.

"But I was not aware—I did not intend—" she began—and he thought she knew perfectly that silence between them was an ultimate intimacy,—beyond the outer barricades of speech,—for which neither of them was prepared. It quickened his hope of danger, for if she was an epicure in the flavours of every day, she was more promising of danger than he had dared even to suspect or pray. The moon had risen, ridiculous, at the full,—with that leer of yellow complacency,—“See, he is the Mona Lisa of his sex,” Trent scoffed, as it staggered over the hill opposite, a trifle tipped to one side.

“A thousand thanks for mocking it,” she said soberly.

“Why?” He believed he knew, but he might be wrong.

Her answer was a sigh suggestive of the wasted hours of flower-scented nights.

"Are you tired of it, too?—of it all perhaps? Do you really get tired of things as I do? How sweet of you! I should think all married people would"—he added inconsequently.

His face was as far away, yet as sympathetic, as that of a wistful child, when he said it. She looked at him and realised how close the resemblance was to a Carlo Dolci saint. His hair was so softly, densely black against his temples so excessively white, and thin to asceticism. The eyes came nearer being soft in evening light than she had ever seen them before, and they did not mock,—their blue only deepened wearily under the long lashes. The nose was strong, intellectually high, and the mouth the feature that claimed her and would not let her go. There was a way the upper lip had, of curving up at the right corner, that made the smile bewilderingly sweet and every transient expression beguiling. It lost nothing in character from its innate beauty. It could be cutting as well; keen, satiric to discomfort when he willed. It mocked its own sweetness and beauty often, as if in disdain of so feminine a charm imposed upon the most masculine of men without his consent.

"Why?" she asked softly, after a long pause in

which she had been considering his proposition.

"Why? Oh, because I could get tired of anything I was bound to. I hate to do anything for any reason except because I happen to want to. I should be tired of anything if I was married to it,—"

"If you were very '*amoureux*,' even?"

"It would not last two weeks. It never does."

"Why?" she asked again, she who never questioned!

"On the general principle, I suppose, that Daphne ought to run if Apollo is to run after her. If she is caught of course he stops running. Then it is all over. That is, unless he runs after another nymph—" Their eyes met. Stephanie was trying to match this theory with Raleigh's explanation of the American idea, in different terms, but much the same conclusion.

"This life here is so different for you! How you must hate the monotony of it all! And your old life was so brilliant,—how you must long to go back to it! Don't you ever? Won't you ever?" He forgot his manners in his eagerness.

"I was so very tired when I came here,—I wanted only to rest, only the absence of all excitement. That life for the public is hard, empty, of all,—and after—"

"But there must have been some wonderful days"—he insisted.

"Nights," she corrected. His eyes blinked, dazed, as if he veered from the audacity, the intimacy of the suggestion, of which she seemed entirely unconscious.

"Oh, you are wonderful!" he groaned.

She smiled that odd smile of hers,—that consenting smile that accepted it, knowing it was neither legitimately given or taken. Her mother's name was Pleasure, and surely it was her mother's smile,—too sweet to be sound at the core,—too relenting, too assenting. He held his own mouth firm to grimness as he beheld it, but with effort.

"Don't you pity the people who do not dare play with their emotions?" he asked.

"As much as I adore those who dare everything! I detest, most of all beings, a coward who is afraid of any danger,—"

"Even one who is afraid of the situation changing?"

"Most of all, that person who is afraid of change, and ruins the present by some dread of what is to come."

"We are so absurdly alike,—in some ways!"

"You find it so? Christine said, more than once, to me,—'you will like Jim's brother,—he never says what he means any more than you do,—and he never means the same thing on two following occasions.' Is it true?"

"Perhaps. I am not so sure. I know the only

marriage ceremony I could subscribe to, would go something like this:

"To love or to lose, for poetry or for prose—for roses or for thorns,—till life do us part—and hereupon I give thee my lips, if not my heart."

"Ah, yes," she said sadly, with one of her sudden transitions of mood, "that is the tragedy of it all, for souls like ours. We may swear to-night,—and we are so made, that by to-morrow our fate may have overtaken us in some new form. How to defend oneself from the new charm? That is the affair of most importance? Yes?"

"Please do not be serious," he begged her,—
"do let us laugh while we live, lest we should cry over the joy never-lasting."

A week followed in which he either was, or was playing, dead to the world, though at Grandee's request she wrote him herself, bidding him to dinner with the rest. Joel found her one morning in the garden with the manner of one who has lost something and is seeking it even in improbable places. She had stopped short, when he noticed her, and stood looking down into the heliotrope but not seeing it.

"Lost something, Mrs. Payne?" he enquired, having a question or two he wanted to edge in about the battle of Waterloo, if it came right.

"Thank you, no Joel, I have found something"

—she said radiantly. She went quickly away then, without explaining that after continued unsuccessful effort she had visualised Trent's mouth for the first time.

That night the telephone rang up, when Steven Randall had gone to bed earlier than usual, with a sleeping potion and a French novel beside him.

Stephanie waited, then answered herself, which was unprecedented for her.

"Allo, Allo!" she called in the French fashion.

"Is this heaven?" cried Trent's voice. "Give me peacock, amethyst, and flame, please!"

"There is some mistake. This is Mrs. Raleigh Payne speaking," she said primly.

"Oh, is that you, Joy of Living? How well you are looking to-night!"

Infected by his caprice she called back—"No, it is joy of dying!"

"Well, then, 'let joy be unconfined'; I am coming up to read," and he rang off before she could prevent or prohibit.

CHAPTER XII

FORGETTING

“**I** FORGOT all about your note. I hope Newbold told you,” he said after the first greeting.

“Mr. Randall regretted that you did not find it possible to accept his invitation for dinner,” she replied without comment.

“I do so hate to promise ahead to go anywhere,—it is dreadful to have an engagement hanging over you,” he confided, sure of her sympathy.

“We should not have wished to be something hanging over you,” she assured him.

“And you are not vexed with me for forgetting your note?”

“I adored your forgetting it. Of all the men I have ever met, you are the first to do just that.”

“Yes, I put it in my pocket and never thought of it again until I wanted some more paper to take notes on,” he explained contentedly.

“Is it, perhaps, that you would never have thought to come again, if you had failed that necessity?”

“O, something might have reminded me. It is

just possible that it might. I remember now being all but sure it was from you, and saving it until the next to the last of my mail. There was, I think, that morning a letter from home, some invitations to weddings and things, a letter from Christine's sister and that one from you."

"And you read mine the next to the last,—one is not impressed by your eagerness."

"But I never read the best first. I save it always!"

"And is it permitted one to demand who had the honour to come last, that morning of my unfortunate invitation for dinner?"

"Of course it was a catalogue of rare books for sale. I never get the emotion out of anything I do out of a book catalogue, do you? of rare editions I mean. And when I actually see them, my knees shake and I tremble all over."

"I never have experienced it,—I believe," she admitted cautiously.

"Then you have missed one of the keenest emotions in life, probably the very keenest of all."

"You speak so often of emotion,—I am afraid I do not understand about it, in the same sense,—what it means —"

"Why, music is emotion,—real music, especially Tristan,—and all the poets that make pleasure sparkles tingle in your blood, and Mass is emotion in another form, and sudden intimacies of the in-

expressible, and — everything that makes one forget duty and the golden rule and to-morrow morning!”

“Ah, but yes,— I see, it is indeed another way of saying sin”— she said slowly. “The blessed Imitation warns one from all such excess of the imagination. One may not indulge oneself in such, without reproach.” Trent stared at her.

“What do you know about the Imitation?” he asked in amazement.

“It is my companion always, my book of life. In the convent we are taught to respect and love and trust its guidance wholly, without question.”

“The world would stop if its precepts were literally obeyed.”

“Perhaps the world would not go as fast as now,—perhaps it would be better for contemplation and control.”

“O you are wonderful!” he repeated helplessly. “Who would ever have dreamed you even in his waking moments? If you are going to turn out to be a saint, it is all over with me! But if you are going in for asceticism I shall go in for character. And it is such an ungraceful rôle!”

“You have been going into the world very much, since we have seen you, have you not?” she said, leaving the subject with a sudden discretion.

“Yes, of course. I have many friends here in the hills, and they are very good to me.”

"Then you have not been working all the time, as Mr. Newbold said?"

"A man has to be decent."

"Naturally. And you must amuse yourself very much in your American society. The young girls are so little guarded and so completely the companions of the young men."

"You know it is all deadly to me!" he contradicted, with a sharp change of base. "You are utterly tyrannical! Are you quite satisfied now that you have spoiled everything else for me?"

"Everything else?"

"Yes, and everywhere else and everyone else! I used to quite like the set here, and now they bore me to tears, and it is all your fault!"

"What are you saying to me?"

"You are so selfish," he went on. "You have nothing to do but play music and pick flowers and cavil at a poor hard-working student, who must toil for his living and who must not insult his friends, because he may vulgarly need them to earn his bread and butter from later on! Now, of course, you are a very wonderful person to know,—and I should die and be Carthage in ruins if I could not come here to Sky High, which is probably the most alluring spot on the earth,—but I have to earn my living and I cannot be here all the time for several reasons,—much as I should like to."

She unnerved him by her utter sweetness, saying, "It is true. I believe I have been egoistic and a tyrant. Forgive me! I did not realize it."

"Oh Lord protect me!" he implored, "I intended to produce a scene for the sheer joy of seeing you angry and you become full of compunction, humble, self-accusing! Oh, I am Carthage in ruins! I am a lost man if this goes on!"

He was a lost man anyway. She suspected it, if he did not.

"You treat me so!" he next protested, "I fully expect every time I come here you will trot me on your knees before I get away. You never treat Newbold so!"

"But I do not receive Mr. Newbold as I do you."

"Why?"

"Because,—because he is older. It would not be the same thing."

"I do not care for the way I am treated."

"Then why do you come?"

"I have not."

"But now, to-night?"

"Because I revel in sensations and I find them here."

"What a strange reason!"

"Why do men ever go to see women,—then?"

"For repose,—or amusement,—one would love

so much to be able to give peace." Her convent voice and manner enveloped her as she spoke.

"You never will! except that you pass understanding."

"Then it is for me only to be gay. But you are not gay to-night, though you make a pretense of it," she insisted.

"I am gay," he retorted, "I am very gay,—as gay as a mirthful misrecordia. I ought not to have come. Why did you make me come?"

"Why should you not have come?" she disregarded everything else he had said.

"Because it is going to be a sin,—sometime if not now."

"I am not sure if you would recoil from what you believed to be sin. Tell me if you think that you would?"

"That would depend on whether it was man or woman."

"I suppose God is angry with us when we sin,—when we give ourselves over to our own happiness —"

"On the contrary, I never feel so near God as when I am happiest. I am happy now, are you?"

"Not if you are really angry and impatient with me. But it seemed to me so little to exact,—only that you will be always bored where I am not."

"It is always a bore where you are not. And

yet you wonder that the women hate you?" he sighed.

"I hope they do not."

"You know they do."

"Christine Trent has too much character to be so unjust. Grandee says so."

"She may have told him so, but that proves nothing."

"Won't you begin to read, please?"

He opened the book and settled down into his chair, having arranged all the cushions within reach behind his head.

"I am not going to read to you any more after to-night," he announced. "You remember, perhaps, what happened to a certain Paolo and Francesca who read aloud once too often?"

Her eyes danced. She found him a gayer play-fellow than even those old Viennese mirrors of her childhood. Yes, surely gayer even than the fountains.

"Was it not too amiable of Paolo to accompany Francesca to perdition?" she cried, "so many men would have exclaimed 'place aux dames!' and remained themselves behind."

"It was rather decent of him," he admitted coldly.

"The only sad thing about death is that one is obliged to do it alone," she ventured timidly. "I am afraid of being alone. I am afraid of myself."

"It does lack mutuality, but so do other things," he suggested. "You recall the objection of Aucassin to heaven, do you not? As a place where there were no lovely lovers?"

"If you are not disposed to read, shall I perhaps play?" she proposed. "I hear the rain and it drops on my heart, like Verlaine's. I cannot endure it to-night."

"It is good to forget"—was all he said when she finally ceased. "Euripides knew it, when he said—

"To sink the fretful day in cool forgetting.
Is there any way with man's sore heart, save only
to forget?'"

and went absent-mindedly home in the dark and rain, leaving his hat on the hall table.

And her own heart quivered at the thought. Was it forgetting? Who? What? Music is said to be an indiscreet confidence,—“but I am a ghost!” she protested to her heart. “I am dead and buried. There is nothing for me but this living death. For me all is finished.” And then overwhelmingly rushed the persistent uncertainty as to her present wisdom in remaining in America, when Raleigh had wished her to return to Europe with him. Why, after all, was she here? Because she was afraid to take the risk of increasing the chances her presence would involve? If some stranger should speak the name Nicholas Heath-

leagh had at last withheld, ought she not to have been there at the moment to explain and extenuate? And yet how could she support the intimacy of a lover's journey with a man who had in fact stolen from the dead? And that too, with the boast of his own honour forever on his pharisaical lips! "Perhaps I shall die before he returns." "Perhaps something will happen"—she relied now on the uncertainty of fate, as much as she in other directions and relations dreaded its interference.

She met Lawrence Trent next at a garden party at Christine's, where they avoided each other and both went home irritated and wondering "what have *I* done to deserve offence?" Trent devoted himself to a pretty and inferior little creature, the mere male aroused dispassionately, but proud to perceive his effect. Which seemed to Stephanie a reflection upon herself and a limitation of him. It was Newbold who took advantage of the ensuing indifference. He not only went up to Sky High oftener, but he dragged Trent in his wake to all sorts of functions elsewhere, and preached at him the value of the general in social relations. The world might have come to an end there, for these so ill-regulated and wilful spirits, had not Grandee emerged from his eyrie and given a large dinner. They were separated by the whole table's length, and only one swift glance united them, as they happened to raise their glasses at the same in-

stant. But it rewarded them amply for their wasted evening. Trent's glance, passing swiftly to Newbold, detected observation of the incident, which slight as it was, he preferred to have go unobserved. Stephanie chatted on unconcernedly, as if she had merely tossed a bon-bon to a good child who had been patient under exasperating conditions. He was puzzled to decide whether her casual manner was studied, or unintentional, or if she too had divined the instant importance of not being in earnest, under those odd eyes of Archie Newbold, that so rarely looked at what they saw, and saw most clearly by indirection. He saved the thrill of that unmasked moment to re-capture later, when he might safely dare to let himself go to the physical sensation and the import of the impulse so spontaneously indulged by both. The next time he came to Sky High it was to read to her as impersonally as if he had been entertaining an aged relative. No hint of themselves betrayed either by manner or inclination. He read on and on. She knew that he had forgotten her, his young face grown studious and keen as he read, regardless that the language was almost meaningless to his single listener. But Stephanie watched his mouth for her pleasure, and knew he was not with Nina, or any other girl, and that was enough to get from any one form of enjoyment. Last of all, at her request, he read a few pages of the "Imitation,"—on

"The Royal Way of the Cross." His voice was desperately sweet and passionless, and possessed by the sacred import of the words. She had overcome all obstacles put in her way and been across country to a Catholic church that morning, he had received at the early communion in the rustic chapel supported by the summer colony, and they both warmed themselves in the safety of their moderation, and the feeling of spiritual comprehension between them, devoid of all more violent charm.

"It has been very blessed, to-night," Trent told her, as he went away. But half way down the hill he had paused and nearly gone back. His sense of humour made the evening the most screaming farce he had ever played, as he lived it over in memory. He turned as if to follow his mood,—then the village clock struck soberly, steadfastly, and he turned back with a gay smile on his lips and a light of utter mischief in his deep eyes.

It was not that Trent was a hypocrite, or underbred or any of the double-hearted types described, by those who fail to like them, as insincere. He was perfectly sincere,—only his sincerity was true to as many moods in their passing as there are sands on the shore of the sea. He was true to his reactions as well as his positives, and his own personal pendulum, having swung as far as it could in one direction, was inevitably bound to swing as far in the other. In his relations with Mrs. Ra-

leigh Payne he was not prepared for such extremity of piety,—without its rewarding excess of something very much the reverse. And of this he either had been cheated by taking her too seriously, or had cheated himself by going home too soon. He wished very much to know how it had left her. And if she was laughing at him too.

Stephanie was not laughing, however. She knew him to be a rarely devoted churchman, fasting before mass like any Catholic, and with a serenity on his pale face afterward, which she associated only with her saints. He looked too frail at times. It made her shudder, remembering an ascetic young priest who had fasted himself into an ecstatic death,—when Trent with a sudden revulsion of feeling would become so worldly, so luxurious, so sophisticated, so utterly unreasonable, ill-natured and difficult, that she was ashamed of her spiritualisation of his unreliable if appealing individuality.

Newbold had told her that his career was as yet wavering between the priesthood and the literary profession but not to so remain beyond the next few months. And Trent himself had told her, very amusingly, of his playing priest in childhood, and refusing to “swop” the benediction for the pater noster, in the sacred rites of the nursery, where he ruled as Pope even over his older brother Jim. Remmington, in describing their arrangement of the Squirrel’s Nest, had given her yet another vista,

when he explained that he himself slept out of doors and Newbold in a hammock on the piazza, but Trent in a narrow cell of a room on an iron bed,—like any Franciscan. It was as hard to reconcile his personal habits of Spartan restriction with his love of luxury and self-indulgence, as it was to follow the vagaries of his conflicting temperament. Here, the Catholic side of Stephanie grasped him by sympathetic intuition as no one of the Americans nearest him could ever hope to do. The fasting before a feast, the system of penance and indulgence, the trance of the High Mass, and the exercise of emotion in all the successive celebrations of her religion enabled her to appreciate phases of his transient experience, as would otherwise have been beyond her reach.

At last, when July was spent, there came a night when Grandee had retired, when prose was laid aside and he read recklessly into the heart of poetry. Swinburne's *Tristram*:

“Love that is first and last of all things made —
The light that has the living world for shade.”

“I am thirsty, may I have something to drink?” he asked, breaking off in the middle of a line —

Together they silently crossed the hall into the deserted dining-room. On the table stood a loving cup filled with crimson roses. There was wine on

the sideboard,—she brought several decanters herself, not caring to summon a servant at that hour, and placed two heavy gold-chased glasses beside them.

They sat down, Trent at one end, Stephanie at the side. She laid her hand on the white wine, but he saw it and poured both their glasses to the brim with red, without consulting her taste. The poetry, that was in her eyes and in his blood perhaps, seemed also in those crimson goblets waiting for their red lips.

“What a perfect eve of Saint Agnes!” he sighed, sinking luxuriously back in Grandee’s great chair with a little murmur of voluptuous satisfaction. “May I smoke? Incense is really necessary to such perfection. And you?” offering her his cigarette case as he spoke—

“No, not now,—not here, ever”—she added truthfully. He was instantly conscious how well she might lie; approved and appreciated the reverse quality of such painstaking truth-telling about nothing, to a nicety. To Trent’s mind truth in a woman, carried too far, dulled the edge of husbandry. He told her so, trying to make her catch his notion.

“And what does husbandry do?” she inquired, rather confused by the word.

“Husbandry? Oh, husbandry dulls the edge of everything,” he assured her, laughing.

"But you are sure you do not mind my smoking? Please be honest about that!"

"I adore it, on the contrary. Blow the least little breath of it to me!"

He blew a ring of the faint smoke over to her. She inhaled it daintily, indicating its pleasurable-ness by one word—"Delicious!"

He repeated it, as she drew the roses toward her and buried her face in them.

"Encore!" she begged, leaning toward him, and again the breath of blue smoke encircled her, winding about her and through the red roses near her breast, lightly as some hovering butterfly.

Her face relaxed softly. It impressed Trent suddenly as the most intimate thing he had ever done, or seen done on the stage, in all his life. It gave him a perceptible shock of something that was like fright, but the wine excited him beyond caring for that or any other warning.

"It is like throwing kisses," he said, his eyes brilliant with his own daring.

She smiled that strange, wholly provoking smile of hers.

"It is not so unlike Europe, here, to-night with us, after all," she said happily, nestling in a rapturous little way of her own in her chair,—“I was never, before Sky High, accustomed to these long sad hours of summer. Abroad one goes at evening to hear music, you know? To take supper, to

drink liqueur, or to promenade or admire some spectacle. One dines late and sits by some lake to be enchanted by the gardens and the fountains out under the stars. I love best the night, in Europe. If I had been God, I am quite sure I should never have thought to make the night,—it is too beautiful,—and for it I adore Him most.”

“And I should never have thought to make day.”

“But yes, the day to sleep, or dream, is also necessary!” she said with a shrug and smile. They raised their glasses, eyes deep in eyes. He felt her gaze all through him. The glance exchanged between them at Grandee’s dinner party had merely hinted at such unmasking. She allowed her own emotion to blanch her slightly, her mouth giving away to that smile he dreaded, yet coveted, to his soul.

“It is so strange to have found you here”—he murmured. “I have always known there must a woman like you exist,—for my poets knew them,—but I had never found one and I had almost given up in despair.”

“But I knew you at once,” she urged. “I said, as I gave you my hand that first afternoon,—if I knew you and loved you I should call you Gaston. I knew you were of the world I came from, and the world of all unreal and amiable pleasures that perish, and that your soul had also its altars unseen of the others,—but you —”

He did not let her finish her impression of him and his behaviour.

"I saw you and adored, of course, that first day, but I thought it would be Newbold!"

"He is altogether charming," she admitted, as if she saw in her statement a cause for inward regret.

"Women generally find him so."

"But you could never be jealous of him,"—her eyebrows arched reproachfully.

"I am jealous of everybody, even of Joel Underwood!" he flung out, reluctantly.

"Why?"

She leaned toward him slightly, across the roses, around which one arm was curved. For an instant his heart stopped beating. Her mouth was consenting. Of course she meant nothing, nothing. He realised it even before he began to breathe again.

"One more breath of your cigarette," she said. "I have not had a taste for so long a time! Mr. Payne smokes them always, but Grandee never, and none of you who are his friends, but always those great cigars."

The mention of her husband sent a jagged quiver of jealousy through him. He leaned a little forward and blew a long breath of smoke deliberately through the roses that half hid her face. Their eyes met and each knew what the other read therein.

"I hate you. I want to dance with you," — he stammered,— then drawing himself to his feet, "I think I had better go home now. Good-night."

"Yes, you had better go home," she said gently. "Good-night, Gaston!"

Neither glanced at the other. She stood motionless until he had gone out by the long open window, then turning off the lights, she crept noiselessly up to her own room.

It was midsummer, and no rain for weeks ensuing upon that night when Stephanie had played to drown the rain that rained on her heart. The magic of midsummer had begun. The chestnut blooms were whitening on the hillside, till when the wind blew they gave her the feeling of flowing, crested billows on a far French coast. All day the red and yellow flowers in the garden reached and leaned toward autumn, and stood wakeful and unrefreshed under the red full-moon all night, in spite of the drenching dews. Joel Underwood fumed and watered and inveighed against all humanity, and swore under his breath at the season's failings. And up on his balcony Steven Randall read, and remembered, and grew strong enough to drive about with Stephanie and even accept a quiet invitation sometimes or profess to, perhaps to keep her from noticing how long it was since Raleigh had gone, and how little his reports said as to his return dates. Trent seemed to be devoting him-

self to Christine's sister Nina, which was a wise thing to do, considering the wealth that every one knew was to be hers on the death of a great-aunt, whose will was made in Nina's favour and lying in the safe at Jim Trent's town office. There was a hard determination in the boy's bearing that worried Remmington sometimes. There were nights when sleep did not settle down over the Squirrel's Nest as it should, and Newbold, stalking from hammock to garden wall, encountered another restless apparition, also smoking, and took occasion to deliver wise discourses on the art of being general in society; keeping away from Sky High himself for ten days,—to show by object lessons how easily it could be done. Grandee did nothing to encourage further relations and the summer seemed to have stopped.

It was Newbold who proposed calling on Mr. Randall and Mrs. Payne, the evening after Lawrence Trent had announced he was off to the sea for a change of air. Trent considered the suggestion intrusive, but would not commit himself by an appearance of wishing to go alone. The call was a gay one, for they were out on the terrace, with Randall in unusually good spirits and Stephanie unaffectedly glad to break the fast of their absence. When the clock struck ten they rose to go. The conversation had been entirely general. They made their good-nights without asides or any de-

viation from the commonplace. Half way down the hill Newbold remarked on the fact that Trent had made no mention of his leaving next day.

"That is so. Do you suppose they will think it brutally rude?" he exclaimed.

"If you really are not coming back, it does look so,—at least it is queer, after the hospitality you have taken from them the last two months."

"I suppose it is. The fact is, I was thinking about other things all the time we were up there to-night."

"Then why not go back? It is early yet. It would not take but a few minutes and I will wait for you."

"No, go on home," Trent said, as he turned and left him.

Five minutes later he was back on the terrace. He stood facing the lighted drawing-room, his arms tightly folded, as if to steady his purpose. Stephanie was there alone, Steven Randall having already withdrawn.

She seemed to take his reappearance for granted.

"I came back because I forgot to tell Mr. Randall that I came to say good-bye, to-night. I have found it necessary to be off immediately,—family matters, and all that sort of bother. I wish you would express to him my thanks for all his kindness. I shall hope to meet him again, somewhere."

He did not express the least regret or the least

inclination to ever see Sky High or Stephanie again. None are so stern, so cruel, so uncompromising as the young under conviction.

As for her, what could she say? There was nothing she might say without loss of dignity, however she might feel. She ventured only upon a conventional wish for his enjoyment during the rest of the summer.

"Enjoyment!" he jerked out against his will. "I told you you had spoiled everything for me. I do not want to go away and enjoy myself. I hate you!"

"That is like an American man, to go to one place when he wishes to remain in another!" she mocked.

"If I stay here I am afraid it will change, and it has been too perfect." He still kept his arms folded and his mouth set defiantly.

"And if it must change, since all changes, why not let it grow?" she asked, her voice sinking to a thread.

"I am afraid to let it grow."

There came a long pause like a shadow of fate.

"So, I am going," Trent said. "May I have a rose?"

"But you will never wear one,—you have always refused before—"

"I want this one though,—I will wear this one." She gave it to him silently. He placed it inside his

coat, out of range of Newbold's inquisitive eyes. They both knew it was not the first he had worn there, or kept with him through the soft summer night.

"Good-bye," he said.

"One moment," she begged,—leaving him where he stood. She hardly knew herself what she intended. She passed straight to the sideboard in the dining-room, and returned to him motionless by the balustrade, with a glass of red wine in her hand. A moonbeam struck through the crystal as she held it out to him with the one word — "Drink!"

He drank until she took the glass from him, and draining it deliberately to the last drop, let it fall to the stone flagging. It shivered in a thousand pieces. Then she turned from him without a word and disappeared into the house.

Joel Underwood swept it up next morning, but for days a brilliant spot of red wine clung to the flagging, the sole reminder of that one for whom the moon sought through the garden in vain.

Stephanie waked to an unfriendly day of grey wind, streaked through at intervals by sunlight that could not make the impression less ungracious. It was chilly even in the protected terraces of the garden. The tall foxgloves swayed awkwardly as if resentful of the liberty taken with them, and the porch even was transformed to a tempestuous

storm centre, the vines clinging to the posts with all their slender strength. Even association, Stephanie felt, was being swept away by this heartless summer gale that brought none of the longed-for rain to ease the ailing countryside. To sit behind doors was unspeakable to-day. She was restless, undecided, and under all was the dull wonder that it did not hurt her more. So the "grand passion" had been but a passing malady! The divine insomnia had merely taught him how to dream more profoundly. She turned a hard face toward the red roses in their second blooming, whispering to herself, "I hate you! Oh, mon Dieu! how I hate you!" and then sneered at herself for being melodramatic. What power had this boy to make her suffer like this? She did not want to be alone here. She wanted him to stay and,—he had gone. And gone to Newport to a house-party given by Nina's great aunt.

She read again the letter from Raleigh received the night before—"the Ambassador asked for you, with a thousand compliments. And our own attaché begged his 'devoirs.' As soon as the new ministry comes in, there is sure to be an effort to get us back. Graf von Hochreither sends you his respectful greetings,—and in short as Shakespeare says, my dear far-away lady, 'you are asked for, and sought for, and called for and longed for' on all sides. And why not? They all ask why you

are not here with me,—and really, most charming Highness, why are you not? A kiss for your Serenity! Should you like me to accept Buda?”

She read no further. Why was she not there with him? Too many answers flung themselves in her face at once to answer clearly.

Why was she waiting alone, in a New England solitude, instead of shining in the most brilliant quarter of Europe with a husband who was completely in her power? “I am an imbecile,” she told herself,—as Joel, coming upon her round the shrubbery, handed her a yellow telegram.

It had no beginning or end, and was unsigned. She read the six words, and the tide rose in her heart, for she knew whose plea it was —

“Write me things about yourself. Amen.”

CHAPTER XIII

A WARNING

DOCTOR WYLIN turned back a second and even a third time, before he left his private office. The October sunshine, that hinted of harvest beyond the barren city streets, failed of his usual response. His office hours were over. He only gave consultation by appointment and his day was professionally free at one o'clock, or would have been if he could resist tearing up and down the avenues and cross-streets, to lay his finger on a pulse here, and abbreviate a diet there; encouraging, scolding, inspiring by turns. He had no patience with ill health and the endless stories of jangled nerves poured into his acute ears. If people lived decently they would live long and happily was his wide-spread propaganda. He had been preaching it all his life, and saw no abatement of those surest symptoms of brain-fag in the generations on-coming to take the place of those slipping under the wheels of ambition every day; symptoms which he detected with closed eyes often, merely by the timbre of a voice that did not carry firm to the end of the sentence, an uneven point of view, or that irritable, hasty judgment of men usually and

normally prudent, until overcome by the stress of hours and burden of responsibility. Women, Doctor Wylin had refused to treat as soon as his skill had put him in a position to dictate. "Any charlatan can undo my work in an hour with them,—science is only their latest doll,—when I tell them to do house-work, instead of prescribing Aix at the height of the season, they drop me instanter for some insinuating chap who talks to them about their temperament," he declared. "I know them, all types and species. When I find one worth preserving, I save her. You remember what Leopardi said to the beggar,—when the creature whined for a soldo to keep his life in his body,—‘why?’ And there were few of his friends who cared to argue against him on his favourite theme. Of course he was a bachelor himself, an error in his theory of the race progression, to which his attention had been called, more than once by recalcitrant patients, who resented some of his blunt statements as to their real needs and abuses."

He did not like this engagement to lunch with Raleigh Payne at the University Club which he was just about to keep, because he was fond of him, as the nephew of his old friend Steven Randall. Eliminating business interests from their mutual relation, what was there left? Pleasure, neither his host or himself would have cut out of the heart of the day. So if two busy men were to sacrifice

daylight hours it must be the professional alternative,—and if professional it could mean nothing less than the inevitable smash he had been dreading ever since he last met Raleigh, on an overland limited four nights out from Seattle and fuming to make an engagement in Pittsburg, that even without detention it would not have been within human possibility to effect. Else why should the appallingly busy nerve-specialist be called in to waste his gold-minted time over mere eating?

He took care not to show any interest in Raleigh's external appearance, as they met. There was also no apparent unconcern in the way he disregarded the towering figure; no subtle intention visible in the carelessness of their greeting. They settled themselves to picking out their lunch in a holiday mood, without regard to dieting, or any nonsense of concession to their physique. Raleigh Payne's personality was in such high vibration with realities, it kindled a contagious response. His eyes were bright, his appetite keen.

"Never better in my life!" he exclaimed in response to the usual formula as to his own condition, following upon minute enquiry for Steven Randall. He drew his fingers across his brow and temples, as he spoke, as if to scatter the remnant of a mental suggestion.

"Been hard at it to-day?" the doctor asked.

"Oh, nothing special. These electric fans are

a nuisance always. It is too late in the season for them any way. If you don't mind I will have the nearest one stopped." He motioned to a waiter, without speaking, and instantly the whirling torment ceased. Doctor Wylin noticed that the servant had understood without an order. That meant he had stopped it before,—and that meant a tired head for longer than to-day. As the luncheon progressed the doctor's curiosity increased. How long would Payne keep it up? They chatted of politics, of business, of entirely irrelevant things, never once reaching health. Nothing was revealed, nothing concealed, yet here they were, two of the most sought, even pursued men in town taking the vitals out of their day over a luncheon, like any two frivolous women!

"When did you get back from Europe this last time?" Doctor Wylin asked, when there came a pause that seemed available for personalities.

"The twentieth of September," Raleigh replied, never hazy on a date however unimportant.

"Have you been at Sky High much of the three weeks since, or out where I found you, between the rising and setting sun?"

"Why, no, I have been unlucky about getting any rest since I got back," Raleigh said, frowning. "We docked too late to get away from the city that night and I got caught in a business whirl next day, that kept me down all the week. Then I ran

up and had been there about three hours when long distance summoned me West, and since I saw you, I have put in some hard work at Pittsburg, and then been back and forth to Boston a couple of times, and done the pipe-laying for the annual meeting of a big company I am interested in here, beside getting my report up for the government. Of course that is the thing that takes head, and is of the first importance, the rest of it only takes nerve."

But the doctor could not wait.

"You gilded monopolist. I have got to be off in five minutes. What is the trouble with you, Raleigh Payne? Got a touch of gout or conscience? Own up?"

"Nothing in the least the trouble, Doctor."

"Then why am I here?"

"I just wanted the pleasure of seeing you."

"You mean you dreaded the sight of me so, you were scared, and you did not dare stave me off any longer! Now go ahead, what bothers you? It won't make you smash any sooner to be honest about it, you know, so don't trouble to lie."

"Smash? I? Not a bit of it! I was never better physically in my life!" The doctor sighed impatiently.

"Europe is full of men who said that to me, in just the same way. They are at every resort on the riviera and every continental 'cure.' Look for

them in wheeled chairs when the day is mild, wives and attendants following," Doctor Wylin remarked in a stage aside.

"I am telling you the truth,—I respect you too much to prevaricate with you, Doctor. I am perfectly fit in every way,—only I cannot seem to do the thing I am immediately doing, without doing two or three things ahead at the same time."

"Of course."

"If I attend a dinner, for example, I am ahead of it, and counting it off from my engagement list as one thing more done, while I am at the oysters. At the next course, I am mentally at the club keeping an engagement for some important interview, and home and in bed and up and breakfasted and off again at the next day's work."

"A plain case of anticipatory absorption," the doctor said, smiling. "You want to let go. It is a let-up in tension you need."

"I knew you would say that. I have tried, but I can't."

"How seriously have you tried?"

Raleigh made no attempt to equivocate. "I did not mean to accept that last European commission," he said soberly. "I wanted to take Mrs. Payne off for a trip somewhere, away from all business considerations. But my ambition got in between, and she would not go in the way I was obliged to,

or thought I did not really want to take her on so hurried a trip,—and I resolved to come back and drop everything for a holiday. You see how it has resulted? I feel the walls all around me and I cannot seem to get out!”

“Nonsense! You have money and reputation enough to satisfy any man,—or woman. You are in the Trust muddle now, are you not? But that will go the capitalist’s way. There is no hope for the people’s case, unfortunately!”

“It is not that I cannot stop for any reasonable reason, I mean I cannot control my stopping. It is just this persistent running ahead of schedule that bothers me and tires me. I cannot stay on time anywhere.”

“Stop the clock a while then.”

“You mean?”

“Amuse yourself.”

“Go back to Europe, I suppose. Mrs. Payne will appreciate that advice, poor child! She will enjoy a holiday too, I guess, after six months of the country.”

The doctor scowled. “No, I do not mean go to Europe, and talk politics and smoke, and drift round vapid watering places to shop and bore yourself reading newspapers a week old and letting your muscles get flabby. Nothing of the sort! I mean real change,—something to tone you up mentally as well as physically. A month or two way

up in the wilderness to the north, where you have to carry your boat, with only a native guide to talk to, who won't talk about anything but moose or salmon trout, and air that is not part sewer gas and part café cooking fanned at you by balsam branches instead of electric fans that set your head swimming."

Raleigh drew in a long, deep breath. Doctor Wylin approved it heartily.

"I mean where there is stillness unlike that of any tense moment in a play on some roof garden,"—he continued,—“where there is a real bird instead of a chorus of kicking girls, and real water leaping at the side of your canoe; a deer perhaps, bathing at dawn,—long avenues of pines instead of frantic subways with chewing gum signs to look at and patent food advertisements, or the eternal white walls of the tunnel tearing by too near for your eyes to focus without confusion of every nerve of sight. My dear boy, you only need what is technically known as rest. There is nothing mysterious about your case, nothing seriously out of repair. You have set yourself one goal after another until you have degenerated power. That is all."

"What do you want me to do in the woods?"

"It does not matter what you do. Call it hunting or call it fishing,—only go and go alone. And stay until I tell you you can come back. A soul is

sick indeed that fails to respond to the healing of Nature in all her savage beauty!"

"And if I do not go?"

Doctor Wylin leaned forward and lowered his voice to reply,—“Did you ever hear what happened to Maynard’s brother? He was one of your kind,—George Maynard? I will tell you about it some time. He got going so he could not stop, and the one son who survived him has a brain that will not go at all. That is the divine balance of power for you, physically. Doctors understand it. The American race to-day is suffering from the abnormal ambition of the fathers and mothers. Society and business together have done more for race suicide, and put more weak citizens into our glorious free republic, than rum, Romanism, and immigration! It holds true, with some modifications, in city and country alike. The race is degenerating, I tell you. Here, the mothers live on strychnine,—go to any swagger up-town chemist,—they will tell you, if they are not afraid to,—but they cannot tell you if it is the nerves that create the demand, or the drug that makes the nerves. They keep it in one-hundred-tablet-bottles though, all ready to hand out, and you will find it in the beauty-bag of almost every lady of high degree,—and you may thank Chance if you do not find anything worse! The thing that is dragging our American women down is not sin,—honest, red-blooded, high-

handed sin,—but weakness, excess and hurry. The selfish dream of getting the first and highest place everywhere, and they drug to stimulate or console. They are so exhausted keeping step, that they have nothing to give their children but weak nerves and failing will power. Bone and muscle is all out of their race, generations behind! Excitement is the thing. Go to the play to excite your nerves by risqué situations, tease your emotions with decadent French music, sleep with sedatives instead of prayers for a pillow! It is not abusive dressing, or late hours, it is excitement that kills, and you men go even a wilder pace for your stakes are higher. What is theatre to the women is dead reality to you. The consequences mean ruin, not a few idle tears because the actor blew his charming brains out, as the only exit from disgrace.”

Raleigh laid a detaining hand on Doctor Wylin’s arm. “I am really not sufficiently knocked out to be held responsible for all this”—he objected.

“You do not realise it. None of you do, and the brawn and passion of the Italian and the Pole and the Irish and the German and Swede will outwit your brains, talent, culture and all, if you do not some of you come to your senses pretty soon and right about face. What good does it do if you monopolise the whole market, and they corner health and unimpaired power to endure against

you? I am sick of all the talk about survival of the fittest. What if there is nothing left of you to survive? If a man is not immortal while he is mortal, how is he ever to hope to begin to be?"

"You would make power the ideal of character, then, and rule out genius, since weakness is the inevitable shadow of great strength?" Raleigh asked.

"I would make America a force great enough to create and hold her own. Cannot your generation begin it? Where is there an American opera or an American novel, or play that is not filled up with Indians, Niggers or Mexican cowboys? Is it not possible for some of you men of talent as well as force to lift us out of that? Do you sleep?" abruptly —

"I do not lie awake for fatigue or worry. I sometimes get busy over future events."

"Ah, yes, a man may deliberately disobey law and get on very well for a time, but a man who is ignorant of law is in trouble right away! There is a nice distinction there."

Raleigh thought a little before he spoke next. "I should hate to cripple the concerns depending on me by going off just now —" he said gravely.

"Listen to me" — Doctor Wylin warned. "Civilisation depends on a man's safety in defending the other. Each man has to depend on another. No man can insure his whole universe. Neither you,

nor any other man can supply a safe cog in a system, if your will is out of gear. It is as bad as depending on a man who is morally unsound. Soon your mental apparatus will be untrustworthy. They can trust you not to steal or cheat, but you cannot trust a sleepless brain or an imagination that plays leap-frog. You see I do not waste professional phraseology on you. I have told you what you asked me to come here and tell you. That is all. And now I must go."

"I am immensely appreciative of your warning," Raleigh said, rising. Plainly, then, that was all it was to amount to.

Doctor Wylin looked at his watch impatiently to hide his annoyance.

"I have not another minute to waste," he said, also rising. "Will you take a little run with me this afternoon? I admit my car is a hundred-horse-power, and speed not the best thing for you, but I often have to hurry."

Raleigh hesitated a moment, then as if the invitation of the King was a command, accepted heartily.

They ran out beyond the Park, up the Riverside drive extension and plunged into the labyrinths of suburban road paving, high tension electric poles, high pressure derricks, electric trams, screeching trains,—out past Yonkers into White Plains. A little beyond, in a commanding position overlook-

ing the river a stone villa rose directly before them; its awnings and masses of pink geraniums bright as Paris on the summer afternoon. A wall, with a gate on the highway, ran a long distance, denoting the extent of the property. At this gate the car stopped without an order. The doctor stepped out, and drew a key from his pocket.

"Come up with me," he said, fitting the key to the lock in the iron grilling as he spoke.

Within a short distance of the house Doctor Wylin stopped and Raleigh did the same.

"Look!" he said, pointing to the long pergola that stretched the entire side of the house toward the west. Through the shade between the vines the sun fell brilliantly through the white lattice work upon a tall, slight figure, walking up and down with a perfectly measured though inert step. There was nothing unusual about the boy, except that he walked regularly, with studied precision, and from time to time raised his hand to his eyes as if sighting some distant object with a glass, although his hands were empty.

"Listen," said Doctor Wylin in a low voice. Raleigh heard a shrill voice like that of a much younger lad, giving some order, presumably to a servant unseen by them. They stood motionless for five minutes or more, during which the figure never swerved in its steady tramp up and down, with a precise turn at the end of each trip the

length of the vine-clad pergola, with its gay pink geraniums flaunting from every opening in the arches through which the sun beamed radiantly.

"Do you see the flag floating at the rear?" asked the doctor. "You may have supposed you were looking at a pergola, but that is a full rigged man-of-war to him, and has been for ten years or more. He is in command. He walks there every day of his life, sighting ships in the offing and giving orders to his seamen, until he is told it is seven bells and dinner is waiting for him in the cabin. In the rain and in the cold it is the same story. He sticks to his duty like an old sea dog. God pity him!"

"Where are we and who is he?" Raleigh was shocked and bewildered.

"This is 'Mon Repos'—note the irony of the name, please, and that is George Maynard's son, sole heir to the Maynard blood and millions. The only child of a man who got rich and powerful so furiously fast that he passed along this counterfeit of himself on a world where you can fool Nature some of the time, but not all the time or forever! Not even so clever a man as he. I will leave you here a few minutes. I am here professionally of course. They pay me a salary to look at him once a week when they are away; just as people pay the undertaker to put fresh flowers on their family graves. People like their sad things done for

them, you see, and I never fail the Admiral, here. We are great cronies. You will see me welcomed on board with command for a salute and all honours."

There was little or no talk between them on the trip back. When Raleigh got out of the car, he said, "And you were in earnest about my going alone?"

"Positively."

"For how long?"

"Until you do not want to come back."

"You exaggerate awfully, you know, Doctor!"

"That is my business. I have saved a few of you. Your sort of suicide is unfortunately legal."

"Sometimes justifiable and inevitable."

"No, never! Utterly unjustifiable and wickedly perverse!"

Raleigh did not believe it, of course. He had already made up his mind to compromise on Europe. He would carry Stephanie off in a whirlwind, before she had a chance to interpose her whims, and abandon himself to the joy of living, as other men did. Wylin was an old crank. He had ordered men about until he was a faddist, a sheer faddist.

"Too bad about Remsen!" said a voice at his elbow.

"What about him?" Raleigh asked sharply.

"Picked up off the floor here, ten minutes ago, senseless. Over-work, they say. He got his warn-

ing a year ago from old Wylin and snapped his fingers at it."

"Get me a whiskey and soda," Raleigh ordered the nearest waiter, "and send a porter up to my rooms. Tell him to have a taxi ready immediately."

He was not frightened, of course Remsen had been taking high chances and walking a tight rope physically at the same time. It did not affect him, one way or the other, but he was not so cock-sure of himself, or flippant in his estimate of old Wylin any more. He did not care for the way he remembered that son of George Maynard's, framed in pink geraniums,—either. He was going home to Sky High and Stephanie and Grandee to talk things over a bit and get all this morbid trend of thought out of his head.

as her shrill soprano carried even above the steady throb of the motor, and into the honk of the horn. It all impressed him as having happened a hundred years ago.

What possessed a man like Steven Randall to dry dock here,—even if he had been born here? Even if his great-grandfather had been provincial enough to have happened to have been born in the very room around which Sky High had been so laboriously constructed? It would be no shame to Stephanie if she challenged him to a duel, or took the woman's underhand way of stabbing in the dark, by divorcing him, for leaving her in such a spot, if this was a typical Sunday morning aspect. Why, it was ghastly! One could hear one's own heart beat. Why had not the dear child run away, or stolen her liberty in any fashion, long before this? He had never realised how such awful stillness could get on one's nerves before.

The bells beginning to ring might have made it better or worse,—he could not be sure which. No one met him at the door, which he noted as unusual without further inward comment at the time, considering the hour. They must have been expecting him, though he had only telephoned from a near station, for the motor had been in waiting. Randall of course would have been served ~~his~~ breakfast upstairs, and by this time be in the midst of his protracted dressing, completed between news-

papers and tonics. He went directly to his own room and crossing it knocked on Stephanie's door, connecting. There was no response. He knocked again, listened, hesitated and turned the handle. It was open,—but there was no one there. The same Indian summer sweetness and stillness came in at the latticed windows flung wide. The room was full of a recent presence in spite of its utter vacancy.

“Beware the absent woman!” the French say with justice. She was everywhere close to him here, because she was not at all. Her foreign mannerisms met him at every glance. He saw her smiling before the mirror, turning away, stooping, standing with uplifted hand as she touched her soft hair,—yawning her little languorous yawn of content and provocation; mocking him, absent but prevailing.

There is no sting so keen as a remembered sweetness of love's hours passed. The only thorn that scratched him now was the rosary hanging over the ivory crucifix at the foot of her white bed. And instantly, as if her spirit avenged his resentment of her religion, came a vision of her kneeling beneath it,—a vision to soften the scoffing soul of a satyr.

More than the actual sight of Stephanie, the room she lived in overpowered him, giving him back not only the woman his wife, and their actual

relation in which they stood to-day, but the little girl of Carlsbad, the Mistress of his dreams, the bride of his realisation, the glory of his "lune de miel!" Even the violet sachet from an open drawer of the dresser was accessory to forgotten emotions. The later, less impassioned, less intimate because more taken for granted relation, withdrew,—leaving this ghostly touch of mere things their unhindered way with his sense and memory and desire. If memory is immortality, as the psychologists hold, surely a man must take new reckonings to determine the exact location of his own probable inferno, his own probable paradise. Perhaps Raleigh Payne would have concluded both to occupy the same given place, at that given Sunday morning. He felt the focus narrowed to its point, gave himself up to its impression,—then recognising himself as an intruder, he hastily went back, downstairs in search of her whom he had found, as he had hardly hoped ever to find again so fully, in essence and unreality.

But the house shared the aspect of desertion with the world outside. A maid returned his good-morning greeting with a brief acknowledgment and hurried away. Joel Underwood never came at all on Sundays, being a deacon engaged in the active employ of the rigours of his biased Baptist piety. As he had breakfasted on the train, there was no occasion for service of any sort being offered him,

and yet the lack of welcome depressed him. He would not hurry his uncle. He knew the force of leisurely habit though it had never been his own.

The church bells were just beginning to harangue the valley. He strolled out upon the terrace and stood overlooking the distant scene, and indifferently scanning the road under the wall, where decorous church folk began to plod their dusty way toward their sacred duty. It was the usual country procession,—a superannuated buggy or two, a wagon load of children, a smart cart well driven from the wrong direction with occupants too be-feathered to be other than papistical servants from some neighbouring villa,—then a family on foot, a pony-cart and again the recurrent buggy with a faded couple who resembled the daguerreotypes of long ago. Suddenly, he saw the silver mountings of Steven Randall's blood bays emerge from the woods. They came on steadily at a sharp trot regardless of the stiff climb on the road. Some one was evidently in a hurry. It revived him to think so! At the garden gate in the wall below, they stopped and Stephanie got hastily out, followed by a tall man garbed in clerical black. She stood for a few moments looking up at him, her back turned toward the house. From his shaven face, and his unmoved, imperious manner of making his adieus, Raleigh read him at once for what he was, a Catholic priest. Immediately he

relation in which they stood to-day, but the little girl of Carlsbad, the Mistress of his dreams, the bride of his realisation, the glory of his "lune de miel!" Even the violet sachet from an open drawer of the dresser was accessory to forgotten emotions. The later, less impassioned, less intimate because more taken for granted relation, withdrew,—leaving this ghostly touch of mere things their unhindered way with his sense and memory and desire. If memory is immortality, as the psychologists hold, surely a man must take new reckonings to determine the exact location of his own probable inferno, his own probable paradise. Perhaps Raleigh Payne would have concluded both to occupy the same given place, at that given Sunday morning. He felt the focus narrowed to its point, gave himself up to its impression,—then recognising himself as an intruder, he hastily went back, downstairs in search of her whom he had found, as he had hardly hoped ever to find again so fully, in essence and unreality.

But the house shared the aspect of desertion with the world outside. A maid returned his good-morning greeting with a brief acknowledgment and hurried away. Joel Underwood never came at all on Sundays, being a deacon engaged in the active employ of the rigours of his biased Baptist piety. As he had breakfasted on the train, there was no occasion for service of any sort being offered him,

and yet the lack of welcome depressed him. He would not hurry his uncle. He knew the force of leisurely habit though it had never been his own.

The church bells were just beginning to harangue the valley. He strolled out upon the terrace and stood overlooking the distant scene, and indifferently scanning the road under the wall, where decorous church folk began to plod their dusty way toward their sacred duty. It was the usual country procession,—a superannuated buggy or two, a wagon load of children, a smart cart well driven from the wrong direction with occupants too be-feathered to be other than papistical servants from some neighbouring villa,—then a family on foot, a pony-cart and again the recurrent buggy with a faded couple who resembled the daguerreotypes of long ago. Suddenly, he saw the silver mountings of Steven Randall's blood bays emerge from the woods. They came on steadily at a sharp trot regardless of the stiff climb on the road. Some one was evidently in a hurry. It revived him to think so! At the garden gate in the wall below, they stopped and Stephanie got hastily out, followed by a tall man garbed in clerical black. She stood for a few moments looking up at him, her back turned toward the house. From his shaven face, and his unmoved, imperious manner of making his adieus, Raleigh read him at once for what he was, a Catholic priest. Immediately he

re-entered the carriage, the coachman swung the horses round, and set off in the direction of the village from which he had shortly come, while Stephanie came on alone. From above the wood came the solitary cawing of a single circling crow. It carried the shadow of portentous evil and solemnities in its sinister repetition, unguessed by mere mortals but revealed by the birds of the air.

At the sound Stephanie turned and looked in the direction of the carriage, but it was already out of sight. She wore a pale grey costume, shoes, gloves, hat, veil, enclosing her as some morning mountain mist, untouched by Aurora because too perfect to need heightening.

"You look like a cobweb on the grass," Raleigh called down to her.

She started slightly on seeing him, then gave him a shadowless smile of greeting.

"Joel tells me that is a sure sign of fair weather!" she called back, the serious preoccupation of her face entirely scattered by the sight of him.

"I hope so! I am a stormy petrel myself though, since I am come to see the lady of my heart all the way from town by a most contemptible process, and she is not at home!"

He was on his way down to her and they met at the terrace where the scarlet salvias were a fiery

furnace of bloom,—a scriptural interpretation appropriate to the atmosphere of the day.

As they met, spoke, kissed, there was a something suppressed imperceptibly, between them, a something equivocal and withholding,—an unseen third intercepting, always veiled, disguised in a myriad affable blandishments, in eyes that feign, on lips that evade, never beyond hail, unexpressed and shrinking away when challenged,—gone if faced,—yet like a faint scent persistently recurrent, between the safety of non-committal nothings exchanged, parried by trifling, held off, yet closer than each to the other.

Nothing broke actually through, or even threatened, the perfect acting of Stephanie, except that he found it possible to conceive that she might be acting. But undoubtedly she was, and so was he for that matter,—that is, if avoiding an uncertainty because one puts off knowing it is certain, is acting, in that it is feigning in opposition to direct discourse. Constraint was inevitable between a man and woman whose rights in each other were inviolable, yet whose actual relation was so formal as to involve the situation in the eternal charm of novelty and need for re-conquest. There was everything or nothing between them, as they chose. As he appreciated her now, he revelled in the unstaled freshness of their mutual attitude. She was his, and he meant to reward her for her long pa-

tience. He felt oddly excited at the prospect.

Her manner conciliated, while it withdrew herself from his speculative analysis. The harmony between them was perfectly preserved,—it was not spontaneous or involuntary. Beneath her grey chiffon frock, her silvery greeting, there was a throbbing question beating behind her heart. Her conversation was to her, as the water lily lying placid and sweet on the surface of a country pool, while her unseen mental processes reached down in involved coils of stem to the very mud of the bottom. The figure persisted in her imagination as they progressed. Did Raleigh know yet that she knew he had stolen the fame of Nicolai Heathleagh?

Down she went again, secretly, under the sunshine of the actual words they were saying to each other with their lips.

Had some one revealed it to him by chance? Some stranger, some attaché, who, proud to be conversant with the gossip of the court, might say on hearing the story of Nicolai's death, "You knew who the woman was?" And then her unmarried name and the thing was done — It would take so little! Had it been done?

She came to the surface for a moment to encourage Raleigh with a glance of the old coquetry he never could resist, and a gentle word or two.

Then down again, to wonder if he, not she, now

occupied the strategic position in their future relations. Or had he ceased to repeat that story, from some intuition of danger to himself,—or from her hint of its becoming a bore on repetition? If he knew, undoubtedly he would put the worst construction possible on the situation. He had said if he ever found that woman he would torture her by more subtle means than death. Was he doing it? Was this the sort of resentment he had meant, this exile of her? She heard, even in her dreams, that sentence: “No, a more subtle form of revenge than that!” If he knew probably he would not care what became of her.

He did not look as if he knew. He was openly admiring her, flattering her, coveting her with every grace of speech and glance. He was very handsome. She allowed herself to return his badinage and reflect his unclouded mood.

He was sure to trust her not to disgrace herself, and after,—who would listen to any damaging story against the honour of Raleigh Payne, told by his foreign wife, an alien, unknown, a Catholic? Heathleagh had lied of course and Raleigh had exaggerated. There was nothing to be afraid of. She would break through their restraint and tell Raleigh the whole affair, and that Heathleagh had lied if he implied any wrong in their relation. But what if Raleigh did not suspect,—what useless complications she was preparing for herself.

And would any man forgive a woman for abasing herself before him by such a revelation as confession of her part in the Heathleagh affair might drag forth? And would he not condemn her for delaying all these weeks that had intervened since her certainty of the misunderstanding? Might she not spare him, as well as herself, the humiliation of open discussion if he was still unsuspecting?

Since Trent absented himself her letters to Raleigh had been less infrequent, more characteristic. The born flirt and the born poet have this in common, that they must exercise their innate function or cease to exist, and Stephanie bereft of all other excitement turned to Raleigh for amusement and dallied with him on paper, very charmingly, as he was not slow to perceive, without a notion of the underlying reason. She had re-read some of his early letters to her and quite warmed her hands at the flame of that abandoned forge. If she was ready to forgive his false step in appropriating a dead man's poetry, surely he must overlook her having been their inspiration. Neither was perhaps guiltless of high treason to love in its purest sense, but did it not all resolve itself in mutual compromise, in the last analysis?

The other horn of her dilemma presented itself to her dishearteningly. What if he had simply let her follow her whim, and left her there in exile, unconcernedly,—in proof that she had ceased to

be an adjunct to his life. She was then a mere useless tool, yet being his wife she was forced to take her daily bread from his hand.

This grew intolerable,—yet what to do?

It was this extreme of her perplexity that had thrown her approach open to the priest. Out of incense and silence he had stepped forth into the country daylight, conjured by a nameless sacred magic known only to his order. As noiseless as prayer, meek as no dove ever knew, wiser than any serpent the Nile ever boasted, almost in answer to the unspoken longing of the inner sanctuary of a woman's troubled heart—he was here. What wonder if her confession so long disregarded had passed the bounds of the conventional formulas, that she had been led on by the gentle assurance and familiar affection of his holy authority to open her soul to him as a girl might speak with her mother? Whether he had been sent to search her out at the instigation of her own Confessor, Father Damaré, bound to her old life in Vienna, and just now she understood in America,—or whether actuated by inspiration of Sister Angela in the convent of the Holy Mother Mary, Father Mayhew was to her the incarnate priesthood, bringing sympathy, peace and enlightenment. On him she could lay off her self-weariness, her fear of the future, stretching so long and un-promising before her. Her long days of loneliness and nights of wakeful ap-

prehension could let their weight of shadow fall upon his shoulders accustomed to bear the burdens of others, acquainted with other's grief as the divine shepherd of all sheep, the weak and the strong, the safe-folded and the wandering alike,—and knowing how to support it since it was the way of the cross, the only inevitable way to all believers.

He could soothe her from restless indecision, exhort to renunciation, blur the worldly issues, teach her immolation of self by disdain of all pleasures of the sense. If she was weak, he was strong. If she, through disuse of the comforts of the holy ordinance, had lost her way,—accustomed as she had always been to a clear and visible copy of the Light of the World to guide her footsteps, he was quick to hear his straying sheep and herd them back to the infallible fold.

Raleigh read in her fashion of greeting him, that she was not sure just how he might be expected to take this relapse in Catholicism. But there was that in her quiet assurance, her taking everything so for granted, that disarmed him. As if his criticism or even his surprise would, after all, be the only unusual thing there could be in connection with the occurrence. Virtue, Stephanie assumed, ought to be recognised with self-congratulation by one's husband, even if he personally abstained from the forms it took to express or confirm itself. Of course she was a Catholic. It finished itself for

her there, naturally. What was there remaining "en plus" to be said about it? And being a Catholic, she must confess and commune or go to perdition, justly. Which, equally of course, was not to be thought of as possible or believable.

And among these inter-wound stems of the pond lilies of their conversation she was sinking her thoughts and recollections, as they exchanged pretty phrases and admiring glances, on their way up the terraced gardens that Sabbath morning in October. He noted the keenness of the swift flash-light glance with which she sought to probe him, when she thought herself unobserved. It penetrated him, leaving a sudden sense of increased respect for her individuality; convinced him forever of her power to hold herself in reserve if she chose, independently of what he was to her, or what he might wish her to be, or what he might wish to know of her that she might prefer to withhold.

She impressed him, in her flagrant disobedience to his restrictions, as more of an equal than he had ever considered her. His infatuation had blinded him at first to her mental capacity. Up here in the solitude her metal had been tried in a new crucible. She had come out a long way beyond herself of the yesterdays. Man-like, he was stimulated and covetous of something in her that he failed to fathom. The inexplicable suddenly became the superlatively desirable. It is, after all, what a woman

can make a man believe she has and will not share with him, that he never ceases hankering after.

In the ears of Stephanie lingered undisputed the blessed "Ego Te Absolvo" of the priest. "If Father Mayhew gives absolution who shall judge me, who shall refuse it to me?" her own heart chanted on.

And so they turned from the beds of gorgeous, outrageous, flaunting reds and yellows of the autumn's height, and ascended together to the levels of paler sweetness,—mignonette and heliotrope as yet unblackened by the frost.

"My conscience, how still the stillness is!" Raleigh sighed.

"It is strange, how it has of the fascination for me now, here"—Stephanie said reflectively. "It is heavy with significance to me,—and for you, a poet, it must be, ah, what must it not be?" She lifted her dark eyes to his, waiting for response, but he did not answer her thrilling pause in word or gaze,—“and to you,—it must be a poem unwritten, already,” she concluded, finishing her thought for herself.

Raleigh drew her hand to his lips,—“If you knew how I have waited to hear you call me that one word!” he told her, and there was real feeling in his chastened speech, by which she caught not only at his disappointment in her lack of poetic enthusiasm, but the certainty that he was ignorant of her reason.

CHAPTER XV

A PURITAN SABBATH

BUT for Raleigh all that first vivid sense of her, found in her empty room, had vanished. The shadow of the departed priest lay between them. The length of the day with its dearth of anything to do appalled him. He got through the morning hours until luncheon by going over the doctor's orders and his own interpretation of them to Grandee and Stephanie. He was presenting his scheme for a trip abroad for sheer pleasure, when Doctor Wylin inserted his portentous personality by means of the long distance telephone, and made a few pertinently impertinent remarks that left Raleigh rather hollow-eyed. He returned to the terrace prepared to throw over everything and set off alone for his wilderness. Plainly both Grandee and Stephanie were inclined to treat his furious pursuit of health in the North Woods as extreme,—like all his other pursuit of any end he set after. But he did not care to repeat Wylin's hint as to his own unfitness for the honeymoon he was projecting, or to paint for them the all too-convincing picture of George Maynard's

only son,—the Admiral of the vine trellised pergola of "Mon Repos."

Having got over the announcement, what else was there to do? Luncheon eaten, there would be all the afternoon before them without any engagement of importance to fill it, even if he took the evening train, as he had announced that he must. Stephanie was either dazed by the unexpectedness of all he had come to tell her or regretful for another long season of retirement. She did nothing to fascinate him and he was too restless to absorb himself in her. Women are for the leisure and use of men, but not available in hours of nervous energy and indomitable effort. Raleigh would have liked to climb a mountain, the steeper the better. How was he to sit still on a shaded terrace and play the bereft cavalier till sunset?

"Why not begin your cure by taking a nap?" suggested Randall, weary of his nephew's wearing vitality in leash.

"Sleep!" Raleigh derided.

"How horribly active you are! Can't you enjoy the rest up here, even for a day? If not, how are you going to get on in the woods?"

"An active man dreads to get inert and lethargic—"

"There is a mental and moral inertia as well, don't forget—"

"That is just what Doctor Wylin does not al-

low for in this primeval programme of his for me. If I have nothing to use my mind on up there, what is to prevent its grinding on itself awhile and then stopping altogether?"

"A soul is sick that refuses its response to beauty, just as much as to high and noble aims,—according to Wylin," said Grandee decidedly. "I think myself a soul is groping in its own decadence that is not aroused by a summer dawn."

"Perhaps mine is a malady of soul instead of flesh," suggested Raleigh.

"You are not accustomed to the inactive life we lead," inserted Stephanie. "It is worse for you, for that reason, Raleigh. It must be strange to sit so long without other amusement than your own unrest."

"Well, why not drive?" proposed Grandee.

Stephanie half closed her eyes to imply their mutual indifference to this form of entertainment.

"How are the golf links now?" Raleigh asked, brightening at the idea.

"Never played over on Sunday," Grandee replied.

"We might take a run over to Westerly in the motor, and meet my train there. We could dine there at the Inn, and you would not mind coming back alone, would you, darling?" he asked, turning to Stephanie. But Grandee interposed again. He had ranged himself on her side, ignorant of

what was amiss, but aware of something gone wrong between them, in spite of their scrupulous consideration for each other carried to the point of artificiality.

“That is a stupid programme for Stephanie; to return alone, shaking round in the tonneau for twenty miles of darkness on a hooded road without a moon!”

He was openly protecting her now. Raleigh's physical condition did not warrant him in forgetting every consideration due everyone else! Nor did it begin to appall him as much as the foreboding for this dear woman left in his care for an indefinite period again, without occupation, or society, church or passion. The visit of the priest had startled him, man of the world as he was. It had set servants' tongues wagging, and Joel's squint had gathered bitterness that hinted of scorn. And here was Raleigh upsetting his peace like a shaggy dog in a calm pond. What would the fellow do if there was no Uncle Randall conveniently at hand to shelter his wife's good name? And how unnecessarily pretty the wife was,—and what the deuce was she up to with her confessor and her noncommittal manner? He hated to be mystified. And he did not understand what any of them were exactly in for. He was vexed with Stephanie now for saying gently again, “It is as Raleigh pleases, Grandee. For me it is the same thing.”

"But not for my chauffeur!" exclaimed Randall. "He is entitled to his afternoon off on Sundays."

"Oh, if that is all the objection, I will make him want to go fast enough!" cried Raleigh. "I will run down to his house now and fix it up with him."

He was off at once, thankful to be in motion, to be doing something, to be going anywhere! He found the man willing enough,—tired of his own domesticity perhaps and was turning away when Jim Trent hailed him. He got into his cart and went home with him to say good-bye, and how do you do to Christine.

She came to meet them quite triumphantly the happy American matron: her golden hair burnished by the sun, her simple blue cotton frock unable to lessen her glowing beauty, carrying with it an impression of abundant vitality.

"I am glad you have come back to the soil!" she said gaily. "Look at Jim,—is he not the picture of country content? Did you ever see him looking better? He has had only a week up here and he has got a week more,—if nothing happens to call him back." Then when Jim had driven the trap round to the stable and got lost in talk with his farmer, she asked quickly—"What is it, Raleigh? You are out of spirits."

"Nothing much. I have hurried too fast down

a blind alley and got my eyes open at the end. The sight of you and Jim sticks the knife in and turns it round, that is all."

"Nervous break down, I suppose." She took it for granted. Everybody she knew broke down sooner or later.

"Not yet,—but on the almanac as liable if I do not run from it."

"Try a rest cure. That puts ever so many people in the saddle again. Toast, and no news from home or the outside world until you can stand it,—and then an egg, and more of it all until you cannot stand it! There is one kind where you are laid in cold sheets, I forget why,—and another up in the country, where they all wear sandals and one garment, and the women let their hair hang down. It looks like the mad scene from Hamlet. I had a friend up there once. But I suppose you will go to Europe." Raleigh shook his head.

"Not this time. Doctor Wylin says the North Woods."

"Stephanie, too, of course?"

"Stephanie in the North Woods?"

"A wife follows the caravan!"

"What a woman you are, Chris!"

"I am just what I was, Raleigh,—and what Jim has made me." For an instant they both wondered — if — then the balance tipped to common sense.

"You have been terribly hard on yourself and stunningly successful," she said, giving him just the admiration he craved.

"A man wants to make his friends proud of him and do his part in the race," he began modestly.

"In your case it is a thousand horse-power in one man that has disabled the engine," she cried, "I am thankful you are going to slow down in time."

"Life is a fight," Raleigh retorted. "If you do not fight involuntarily, you will be made to, and there is no glory in that and just as much hell."

"What does Stephanie say about it?"

"Accepts the situation with grace, as always."

"But I can see that you are worried about her,—and I do not wonder,—for all your stoicism."

"Stoicism is a beautiful thing for those who have no teeth," he reminded her.

Her eyes filled with sudden tears. He was not happy. She was sure of it.

"I wish you were as happy as I am, Raleigh," she said, in an access of affectionate sympathy.

"Nobody deserves to be, except you"—he told her, and lit his cigar, smoking while she sat turning his affairs over in her mind.

To Christine, coming fresh from the sophistication of cities, the joy of this village life was keen because she had never been fretted by its limitations. The farmer's daughter sighs, when con-

gratulated on the location of her home with its wide outlook over mountain and meadow, while her mother admits "it is sightly enough,—but lonesome."

In the heart of the "centre" there is the same spirit of unrest. Envy of the lazy, gay lives of the cottagers supplants the daily satisfaction in small events, and the rushing motors leave, too often, not only the enveloping dust but a bitter longing for a life of rapid progress and luxury. To Christine, the closeness of community interest here was a constant delight and opportunity. Her home and her heart were alike accessible to the highway, whereon humanity went up the long winding hill to Sky High, and down to the long level of the town. Christine would have felt herself deprived to live off the road, behind a wall or hidden from the cheerful business of the wayfarers. She lived a complex, composite life here, with her head full of her neighbour's hopes and schemes. It was her personal responsibility to see that the sun rose red when the sick boy down at the mill was to be moved out under the elms for a first step toward recovery,—and that the full moon came loitering up over the hills and lit the valley punctually for the straw-rides of young people, who were most of them strangers to her, except as they were part of the universal romance of youth and joy. She knew the quick measure of the Doctor's horse without

turning her head, and was warmed like wine by the swift assurance of help and healing on its way to those who waited in anxiety. The early carol of the milkman shamelessly broke in upon her morning nap, but she liked it, and missed it if it failed her. The white-frocked butcher boy on his way to the out-lying farms and villas, whistled a random, aimless tune, while his horses dragged slowly up the hill. It floated back to her, familiar though defiant of classification,—the call of the road vocalised, without beginning or end. Stephanie said that to drive with Christine was like nothing but the progress of royalty abroad, for every one knew her and she knew them better still, not only by name but by an established relation, on a firm footing of mutual habit and respect. For such multiplied living Raleigh had no taste and Stephanie still less conception. It never occurred to Christine, when she crowded the empty, gable chambers of her cottage with girls out of work or sewing women out of health, as anything but a reciprocal pleasure. Duty or a professed socialism never tarnished her hospitality. She honestly liked Kitty Bryan, who was with her to-day, and honoured her for bravery under conditions which she knew would have made her quail. Once she had asked Stephanie if there was not something the girl could do for her, to keep her on in the country for a while, and Stephanie had counter-questioned —

“What could she possibly do for me?”

And Christine saw it was out of the question. It perfectly expressed the attitude of both women. What could Kitty Bryan do, but spoil the moods in which Stephanie arrayed herself,—those faultless costumes from Drécoll’s hand? It had been a preposterous suggestion. Christine accepted it, and yet she could not help feeling that Kitty might open Stephanie’s eyes wider to valour than even Drécoll’s creations could open those of the sewing girl to beauty.

“She envies you so!” Christine had repeated to Stephanie, “she says, what a grand gift it must be to be Mrs. Raleigh Payne!”

“I believe that the poor always envy the rich,” Stephanie had replied absently.

“It is not in the least that, in her case,” Christine said warmly. “She knows Raleigh’s poems by heart, and it is not his money or social position or handsome self she envies you. It is just the privilege of being his wife! The wife of a poet! And she is not alone by any means in her infatuation. Not the only woman who feels it, I mean.”

“It is then so great an honour,—one that exacts a just appreciation?” Stephanie asked with her eyes half closed in her characteristic manner. —“Sometimes one can imagine one would prefer to marry a man less given to his public. It is not so unlike marrying with a statue in the park, par

example,—that all may admire as they pass. Also, is it not possible that a woman may love better to live in seclusion of some court-yard quite enclosed, rather than the public gardens in gaze of all the world?"

"But of course a woman cannot stop to think of herself," Christine persisted. "It is no matter what happens to us, if the man we love is safe and successful. But it is dreadful for Raleigh to work as he does, without any rest. He will break down and then—" Stephanie smiled sceptically.

"And then," she said, finishing the sentence, "he will rush away and rest like the mad, and return with more force for work than ever before! It is strange why American men marry—" she ventured, speaking as if to herself. "They work alone, they play alone, they rest alone. Why? Is it perhaps your fault? And the American women live so much alone. It is a new idea of your new world. We have not got it, in the same way, in Europe at all."

Christine was remembering her conversation word for word as she resumed her chat with Raleigh now, or listened to his plans for his immediate recovery.

"I never saw Uncle Steven so nervous and almost irritable," he was saying.

"And Stephanie shows nothing, you say? He may be anxious about her."

"She accepts the programme without surprise or apparent regret."

"She has realised the part a woman ought to play in her husband's life. I always trust to the power of example, and she has had time to learn our American ideals and appropriate them."

"It is not so much that, as finding that protest did no good in the past, I imagine. I am surprised myself to see how calmly she has taken this last disappointment. We had planned to go to Europe together for a long holiday," he said with that drawing together of his brows that meant real chagrin.

"You surely would not expect her to try and turn you from what is for your health!" she challenged.

"Wysin has the word of command, I admit,—still—" she saw he was disappointed, that he had expected at least a more expressive outcry in Stephanie's final acceptance of conditions.

"It is going to be hard enough for her, though," Christine sighed. She understood it, saw it in all its limiting aspects. "I cry and get over it, and look round for something to do. I never brood like a mediæval dame whose lord is away on a crusade, but she is not like other women I know."

"The first joy of absence is the other fellow, usually," Raleigh agreed, with an attempt at lightness, but nettled by her implied criticism of his

wife. "You are not that sort, and Stephanie is not that sort either, or any other sort that comes under common classification."

Christine frowned. "A woman gets the habit of a man"—she said slowly. "The more she sees of him, the more she gets addicted to him, and if she does not see him—"

"She gets out of the habit, you mean?" Raleigh asked, seeing her hesitation.

"Then, of course, Stephanie has her different religion," Christine went on. He did not follow up her lead as she perhaps hoped he would, and she added:

"Frankly, Raleigh, do you think it is wise for you to encourage her in these Catholic demonstrations,—having her confessor up here? It does stir up the village gossip so! What on earth can a woman, a lady, have to confess, that cannot wait until you go back to town for the winter? Beside, you are a public man, involved in a host of public trusts, therefore a target for all sorts of attack. Stephanie is a child in a way. She may be taken off her guard, without dreaming of doing the least harm, or betraying what you suppose inviolate. But I would not trust a priest and a woman, not if I were the woman myself! I know you think I am a narrow, bigoted Calvinist, but you must forgive me for speaking out, for you know that next to Jim, there is no one whose ca-

reer is so vital to me as your own, and I am an American like yourself, without illusion or desire to be idolised or kept in the dark of candles and perpetual incense. I am out in the open with you both in the struggle, and I see straighter because I am not a mystic blinded by mysticism or passion. You ought to stop Stephanie's traffic with the Catholic church, unless you are prepared to come up against it later in a way that will damage you, or some of the measures you have at heart."

"Well, well, what a politician and bigot we have here!" Raleigh exclaimed, making light of her admonition. "If Stephanie gets any fun out of a religious flirtation between her conscience and her confessor, I am certainly not going to play George Dandin! There are few women capable of your insight and sacrifice for a man's career." He took her hand as he said it. Her face glowed.

"Your position against the Catholic movement demands it, Raleigh," she repeated.

"I am invulnerable, Chris. It ought not to worry you," he assured her.

"After those poems, how she can care—" she began inarticulately.

Raleigh gave her a strange glance. "Is it true, Chris, I wonder, that a man does his work for one woman, by inspiration of another?" And she knew he meant that his reward came from her ap-

preciation, though his motive power was from Stephanie. And yet in his soul he was convinced that the passion of women like Stephanie is the love that makes will and initiative power for setting all the world's work going. Not many know this, only those so born,—some poets, some prophets and some common people who live on farms.

“Keep her from getting too lonely,” was all he said aloud. “She has none of your resources in the country.” But the seed was sown, and Christine knew it was.

“I will,” she promised, as solemnly as if it had been the wedding service, because it was for him.

The run over to Westerly was rapid enough to preclude conversation. The road was in good condition and they had it to themselves. It was a depressing vicinity to Stephanie,—the zinc soldier's monument on the tiny green of one silent hamlet through which they passed seemed to her the very dreariest object she had ever looked upon. So they sat silent, envied by the casual groups roused by their warning horn, and let the satisfaction of mere speed possess them, since there seemed to be no equivalent for joy otherwise at hand.

Their dinner at the inn was not very gay, though they both made an effort, which seriously reflected on both by turn. Toward the end Ra-

leigh referred to his anxiety for his Uncle Randall.

"I never saw Grandee so unlike himself," he remarked, smoking the last cigar he intended to allow himself for a month.

"He is not able to support the slightest excitement or fatigue. I believe he is troubled about you too, and to say the truth, frankly, he is tired to-day from talking late last night," Stephanie explained easily.

"Talking?"

"Yes, with Father Mayhew."

"Stephanie, you did not ask Grandee to have him stop at Sky High?" His tone was distinctly annoyed.

"No, not in the least. But if I had? Or if he had? Would it be a scandal? What is there so enormous about it? Grandee would do it. He would do anything for me, as I would also for him, *par exemple!*"

"A certainty you should be careful not to abuse." She shrugged her shoulders at the reprimand.

"As for that, I am always in the wrong. It is Raleigh Payne only who is eternally in the right!" she said, half in play. But for the moment she meant it. He saw that she did, though she laughed as if it was all nonsense.

He was informed already from Steven Randall, that the priest had come to confess her, and that

she had gone fasting to early Mass, at the village eight miles distant where the factories made a Catholic mission church a commercial necessity. But at whose instigation it had all come about, no one but Stephanie herself could tell him, and she had volunteered nothing; as if being out of his world it did not concern him, any more than his interests concerned her by his own admission.

"Confession implies such unnecessary penitence," he began again, not inclined to discuss the matter but wanting her to catch a sense of his own feeling. "I remember Grandee saying that it was abolished in the Greek church because a sixteenth century woman confessed to 'relations' with the patriarch. It always amused me that they abolished the institution, rather than the woman or the patriarch."

"But one is not allowed to receive the sacrament without confession, and one cannot be absolved without doing penance and one cannot live without sin," Stephanie stated baldly.

"It does sound like an endless chain, put in that way," he admitted. "I suppose it is all a matter of training and credulity after all."

Stephanie regarded his attitude as that of any heretic. "Have you ever heard of the two nuns who died out of communion?" she enquired. "They were buried beneath the chapel floor and

whenever the sacrament is administered, to this day, they rise and leave the place before the Elevation."

"The insinuation being that your charming ghost might be barred from paradise, if you failed to whisper in some holy Father's ear the exact number of hearts you have broken, or the number of thoughts you have omitted that you should have thought of your absent husband, or the buds you have picked against Joel's express commands? What does a pretty woman confess? You must have to make up sins at Sky High."

"The Imitation tells us that grace visits us in two ways, in comfort and temptation. One is not cut off from grace, even at Sky High," she reproved him gently. And with this he had to be content, for the harmony between them being disturbed, it was no time for discussion of any serious subject, much less one upon which their opinions and education were so widely divergent. In short, he read her as more a part of her own life-system than his life or development, or their mutual existence. She was schism if pressed, but resigned to inactive submission unless goaded to reaction. In the golden books of the married, there is one supreme aphorism,—Avoid the raising of an issue. It is the secret of peace, the rule for appearance well preserved, the test of mated philosophy. If Stephanie preferred to assume that

grace visited her in temptation and consolation, it did no great harm to any fact or theory held by himself. Raleigh Payne conceived it no sin to employ diplomacy in private life; accordingly he walked round the form of his wife's faith, as he had walked round so many issues preceding, and as he was also quite aware she had circled critical differences of taste and prejudice which were harmless as long as unobtrusively disregarded, in which limbo they ceased to actually exist as far as effect upon external events went.

"Your religion is your own," he magnificently assured her now. "Gibbon left out what it meant to a woman, but one can imagine it to play an important part in a passive life. I only ask you to avoid arousing discussion from the point of view of good taste. And please make a vow to be so good that you have no further need of ghostly counsel until you are away from these orthodox sects that look askance at Rome. It is important to me just now, please keep it in the background for the present as much as possible."

"I am to understand you regard religion also as a matter of diplomacy?"

"The absence of its display,—as a matter of expediency,—yes," he replied.

She made no comment on his ultimatum. As he looked across the table at her, she had never piqued his interest more. That she held herself

so aloof from him but completed her attraction. All out of drawing with the setting afforded by the country inn with its primitive colour and local furnishing, she was dining, as if to the inspiration of gipsy bands, with a languor and perfection hinting of mannered courts and gay scenes, of "plage" and "cercle" beyond these dusk-gathering hills, out in the decadent old world of love and folly!

The recognition of it gave him a swift shiver of pleasure. Ah, no, he had not been mistaken. It was only for an instant that Christine had shaken him to-day by her stupendous understanding of him and his needs. No man would hesitate between these two women. He congratulated himself now without regret. Penelope for the others, but wayward Helen for him! Pity he could not give her just what she most wanted and was sulking for! He would later. He knew exactly the rôle to play with her, and the precise spot on the Riviera where he meant to play it. He gave her a long, intense gaze from those heavy-browed eyes of his, that brought the flush to her face. If he had laid his hand on hers, or breathed but a hint of his inmost self to her then, of the spell she always cast over him when she would,—but the servant announcing the car and holding a respectfully hastening coat for one, and then the other, broke in upon the moment that fled with its eter-

nity to follow, as eternity does follow every moment however insignificant.

It was but a short distance to the station. The night was dark and the brilliantly lighted coaches, as the train rushed in, made it doubly dreary outside.

As the movement slowed to a halt, a man looked out of one of the windows of the Pullman smoker directly into her eyes. Then the iron gates of the vestibule were jerked noisily open, the officials stepped down, Raleigh, who had gone to buy his ticket, ran back, kissed her hurriedly, gave her a little hug with that pat between her shoulders which she excessively disliked as an Americanism unbecoming any sort of emotion,—and disappeared.

She watched him on board with a strangling sense of desolation. He was so unfeignedly glad to go! Resentment rose in her breast. It was her only chance at life disappearing in that lighted train, that was sweeping away to the world and leaving her sitting here in the dark alone.

A few drops of rain fell on her face. She had twenty miles of up-hill country road between herself and warmth; the creature comfort of even bath and bed lay for the moment out of her reach. Somehow the train epitomised all that was slipping away from her grasp day by day. The driver had gone to make some inquiries for Grandee. She gave a little half articulate sob, a

sort of groan that escaped her, longing to cry out not to be left behind there in the damp, dispiriting drizzle,—when a voice over her shoulder cried full of an irrepressible gladness:

“This is very joyful! How is Grandee? And how are Joel Underwood and the heliotrope? And how very adorable of them to send you over for me!”

And before she turned her head she knew she could not be mistaken in her recognition,—the man she had seen in the smoking coach had been Lawrence Trent.

With a sudden inexplicable reaction she put out her hand. He clenched it in his own, making no attempt to say his pleasure in the sight of her.

“I accompanied Mr. Payne, who is just leaving us for a holiday,” she said in explanation of her presence there alone.

“And you will let me go back with you, won’t you? Please do, for otherwise I shall have to walk and I hate walking if I have to do it.”

Morton, the chauffeur, returned. He took his place at the wheel and waited for orders.

“How were you intending to go over?” she asked.

“As Providence pleased! And I am very much pleased with Providence for his especial provision.”

“Grandee would be very happy, I am sure,” she said decorously.

“With your permission, then?” He stood for several seconds, as if to compel her to raise her eyes and give the consent for which he waited in every nerve,—then got in on the front seat by the driver. It did not occur to her, until long afterward, that it was odd for a man to be travelling without luggage of any sort beyond a stick, and when Trent remembered his overcoat it was only for sake of his cigarette case in the pocket, being a man of impulse and action under sufficient provocation.

CHAPTER XVI

TRENT

JOEL UNDERWOOD'S reception of Trent, when he presented himself again as a neighbour, was even more significant of the esteem in which he was held at Sky High than Steven Randall's own. The remarkable thing about the boy was his gift of winning perfectly contrary, unaccountable, incongruous, incompatible liking,—all the more amazing because he obtruded his own idiosyncrasies unblushingly, never making the least effort to suppress them or conciliate a mutual footing. Grandee disagreed with him, Stephanie soon noticed, upon every topic brought up between them, but counted the day lost that failed to bring the engaging adversary to his Eyrie door. He pronounced Trent unsatisfactory, but a genius, and enjoyed his moods and pungent prejudices far more keenly than Newbold's balanced opinions or the well-rounded theories of Remmington. Once established as an habitu  , favoured of servants within and without, he returned now to all his former habits as a matter of course; frequenting the house at his own pleasure. Sometimes "led by the spirit in his feet" he brought his books and read

down among the flowers of the garden terraces, without coming up to inform his friends of his vicinity. He liked this feeling of absent-nearness and indirect suggestion; it so delightfully included him, yet kept them at arm's length until he wanted them as actual beings in an actual world. He could often hear the piano, as he lay there in the sun. He fancied it another of the pretty foreign modes of welcome, as it floated down the terraces to meet him. He had thrown himself down beside the only mass of heliotrope still protected from the frost, one morning, like a young faun,—ostensibly to study,—when Joel came upon him.

“Set your eyes on that, will you?” he requested, indicating a spindling La France rose bush he was carrying in his arms. “Stunted for lack of sun! Not a bud all summer long!” he complained, holding it up in all its green enormity.

“But you are not going to destroy it?” Trent protested. Joel focused an imaginary grievance with his good eye, before he replied in his usual indirect discourse:

“Bulbs feed on themselves,—they want the dark,—so do a papist and a violet. Light kills 'em in time. But keep a healthy plant, born to be a free-bloomer, in the shade, and you'll get a stunted growth,—something like a papist bowed down to false idols in the dark. This innocent rose is going to be re-set in the sunniest corner of the green-

house as quick as orthodox hands can set it. I will ask you to look in at it by and by. You won't believe it is the same plant."

The man among the heliotropes comprehended the drift of Joel's allegory and neglected to follow up the conversation. The only part of it that lingered with him was the association of papists and violets. That appealed to him. It sent him off on a fanciful train of purple imagery—in which sacred vestments, stained glass phantasies and the wistful lips of women at prayer mingled in a blur of the æsthetic and sensuous, inextricably confused with the odour of heliotrope. For Trent was a churchman, beyond all ordinary meaning of that term. He called himself an Anglican Catholic; denying the efficacy of priestly intervention between himself and the retribution of his sins, but openly keeping his fasts, and doing his self-imposed penance through abstinence from the gratifications he innocently loved,—devoutly observing the despair of the passion and ecstasy of celebration. His was a reactionary nature, violent in both human and divine appetite. Stephanie and he sympathised deeply, rather than talked of religion together, and never argued. He had confessed that he wished himself born a Romanist; envying them their visions, their tortures even, and all those higher degrees of emotional experience of asceticism so inevitably allied to the extreme epicurean-

ism of his delicate yet intense nature. To him, the mysticism of Stephanie supplied just the final hint of feminine idealism, and when he challenged her for inconsistencies, her unperturbed response—"The church does not concern my head,—only my heart," had suited him wholly—for a woman. That a woman should be religious meant also that she had the other side,—a side he recognised in himself, the passioning imagination, the craving for something unseen and beyond, remote and vibrating with a straining excess beyond the visible life of day and night. It hinted an inward life, fed by desires unknown and unspoken. Her recent confession and confessor, of which he speedily learned on all sides, and which to Christine boded so darkly, had nothing of repulsion for him. Between the husband and the priest, he chose shrewdly, and chose to the advantage of the latter. The Magdalen is not repulsive to the musing of men,—as none are better aware than the priest in orders.

Trent among the heliotropes found himself reduced to terms of sheer envy. He envied her the emotional excitement of it all. And what did he not envy Father Mayhew? He returned to the probable picture with a frequency that interfered with his reading. Stephanie penitent was an unnerving possibility to present to any live man. It was one to hurry a man's blood, were he even re-

motely responsible for so much as a dream over the line toward intimacy,—even the mere verging toward the forbidden thought. He stared at himself for the first time as a potential temptation, before shutting his eyes to the deplorable but seductive spectacle.

The secrecy of her religion fascinated him. Any secret opens the door to unrest, implies discomfort of disclosure, reverses the simplicities of life, introduces complexity through the relations of the faith and unfaith of others. One no longer belongs to oneself. Independence is gone. The secret necessitates involved casuistry, subtlety of intelligence, discrimination, the art of appearing one thing and knowing the other, under the seal.

He always argued hotly against this, when Grandee was defending any phase of Catholicism, in his leniency toward all expression of aspiration. In fact Steven Randall had often repeated at the close of their discussions:

“It is age that condones laxity, youth is all for severity.”

“Youth sees without a glass,” was Trent’s excuse.

“And I am more surprised every day that Shakespeare did not reverse his line and say—

“crabbed *youth* and age cannot live together!”

since youth is for no compromise, and no martyr-

dom suffices it," Randall said, with the touch of inevitable resignation to the-world-as-it-is, in his mellow voice.

"If we began where you leave off, our young enthusiasm would be wasted. You see, most wise Grandee, that if the Church calls her own after the earlier faith is tarnished, she will call too late for our salvation or her own," Trent urged warmly.

"Ritualism and women appeal with equal strength to a boy," Grandee remarked reflectively. "There is, after all, no more sensuous appeal to the imagination than the mere word chastity,—by all it implies."

"What do you consider a man's ultimate safeguard, then? If you insinuate that the church makes concession to his lower nature?"

"I do not insinuate that, but I believe in a man's will as his staunchest defence,—under God Almighty."

"What is the will good for, except to make a choice? It cannot keep you from the pain your choice inflicts. It cannot hold you from your longing, or from fear, or any spiritual misery."

"It makes for right action."

"It makes for self,—and religion kills self, or tries to, in us all. While the church supplies a life and love to inspire devotion."

"And all boys have an appetite for love, sacred or profane," was Grandee's conclusion.

As Trent's own proclivities for a life of religion, the taking of vows and assuming of orders at some later time intensified, he dwelt increasingly on the one step further that would carry him over to the faith of this woman who was so thoroughly a "mondaine," and at the same time so complacently a Catholic; one of the faithful combining the extremes of his own capacities without apparent friction of soul; after the manner of other incredible ladies of church history and legend.

He was reverent by nature and desire, and he seemed to himself to have perceived in holy orders a career that afforded a sacred clew to the hallowing of his feeling for Stephanie, which was no longer a quarrelsome spectre, against which he struggled, but an accepted secret of his hidden heart. It was no longer a secret from him, but his secret,—blent with his religious meditation, even shadowing the intention of his prayers, an occult in-dwelling of a spirit other than divine, yet never wholly human.

He had professedly come back for quiet in which to study and reflect, to realise himself and his own positions. He announced no leanings toward the priesthood openly, but his atmosphere declared him for serious preoccupation and was so respected by the two other men, who were beginning to think of town and the coming season. Grandee claimed him as formerly for long hours of talk and smoke,

but Stephanie and he got on less well than in the earlier, less critical stages of the acquaintance.

One evening, when Trent had been dining with them, the perfection of the dinner had been marred by his brusque contradiction. He never addressed her directly, or spoke her name in the third person, which gave his conversation a singularly detached effect. She wondered if it was unintentional, or if he disliked branding her with the name of another man, or what he did perhaps call her in his own thought. To-night she slipped away after a little and went into the empty music room, to play softly to herself.

After all, who was this savage boy, that he should presume to be so unamiable? He was utterly egoistic. His caprices were stupid. He might have been a pretty diversion to suffice, here in the enforced seclusion. It had looked so at one time in the summer,—but, no, he was “*bête*,” incorrigible, ignorant of usage and indifferent to chivalry. It was but to forget “the snows of yesterday”;—and after,—the roses of yesterday!

It might have been an hour before the curtains parted to admit Trent. She had left the piano and was lying back in a deep lounging chair, staring idly at the wingéd Loves in their painted flight upon the ceiling.

“Good-night!” he called with a bright pleasantness, quite unconciliating.

"Good-night, Mr. Trent," she returned, with equal lack of colour, without rising or turning her head. He waited a moment.

"That is, unless you would care to have me read?" he suggested. Still she did not move.

"Do you wish to read?" she asked; implying that to have been the real question in the past, whenever she had requested him to do so.

"I do not mind"—She heard him go to the library and return. He seated himself in the corner he preferred, turned on the light and began to read without a word. How he read, she knew, for his voice persisted often when he had gone. To-night it was nothing more romantic than an essay of the renaissance, but it kept its golden haze intact under his reading. For pages he read on, too immersed in the beauty he loved to remember her, then suddenly he raised his eyes.

Her own were full upon his face, yet she was not listening. He paled perceptibly, at sight of which the suspicion of a smile relaxed her lips.

He turned his head impatiently aside as if annoyed.

"Don't look at me," he said. A peevish child might have so spoken.

"Don't look at you, how?" she asked, without ceasing her offence.

"That way."

"But what way, par example?"

"Don't look at me hardly at all!" he cried. "If you do I am going home."

Her only response was to repeat her long glance, provokingly, under mischievous lashes, as one might tease a petulant child.

Trent sprang to his feet and began to pace up and down the long room. He turned his head aside not to meet her eyes as he approached her chair.

"How you know us!" he exclaimed. "I wonder if you do know the things men think,—feel, I mean! I sometimes think you do,—and again I think if you did—"

"I know that a certain man is very difficult to-night,—very, very difficult," she repeated, her gaze still on him. Her delicate chin was thrown up, her figure flung careless as a flower against the warm hue of the cushions, one arm trailing almost to the floor, the other thrown back, giving the charm of flesh and line through her lace sleeve. He knew the pose unstudied, for he had seen her fall into it innumerable times without self consciousness. It beguiled him unfailingly, for its gracious softness, a languor, and hint of abandon carried just far enough not to trespass upon good taste.

"You are bored, little friend," she said simply. "I recognise it. Mr. Payne is also bored here, to madness. You never saw Mr. Payne, did you?"

He is very unnecessarily 'beau,' for a man. I will get some of his photographs to show you. That would be diverting, yes? It would perhaps interest you?"

The daring insolence of it lay in his own possessive thought of her, of course,—the thought he had permitted himself of her, not in her intention perhaps. He recoiled, but he was interested. Oh, beyond a doubt!

She drew herself out of her great chair. It was some sort of a rose-coloured chiffon thing she had on, that clung to her. He noticed that, as she left the room, throwing him one last glance,—smiling —

"Is there anything the matter with me?" he demanded, going to the long mirror and challenging his own irritated face.

"Your mouth is an indiscretion!" she cried, and left him.

"Your clothes are a seduction!" he called back. She gave no sign of having heard him.

She was gone long enough to make him speculate as to whether she had not been obliged to hunt for the precious pictures. Perhaps they had been mislaid in some careless hiding, being no longer a vital part of her happiness. He hoped she could not find them. What a triumph if she failed! "Oh, I am glad, glad!" he exulted as the minutes passed.

But she came, bringing several heavy silver-banded frames, and others Rhine-stone studded and glittering in her slender hands. Then, laying them down upon the piano, she resumed her original position; her palms lying open after a mannerism of her own, very helpless and appealing to him before. Trent would not glance toward the piano. He walked off toward the door again. "Make music, please," he entreated, hoping to create a new situation. "Play something peaceful,—some Beethoven perhaps."

"I am not in the mood for white wine to-night," she refused. "I should be obliged to play red, not white,—something gipsy-blooded, Hungarian."

"Good-night, then," he said, one hand on the curtain at the doorway.

"Good-night! Au revoir!" she said sweetly.

He went out into the hall and put on his coat, and again parted the hangings between.

"I hate you," he remarked quietly. "Oh, how I hate you!"

He was gone. She heard the hall door bang behind him regardless of Grandee's first sleep. She did not move. There was no doubt now about the curve of her lips in that relaxed lure of something that was hardly a smile, but her heart was beating deliciously. She saw the rose-hued chiffon quiver above it, like the tremulous wings of a butterfly over the heliotrope. She laid her hand there

as if to seize the traitor in her breast, but really for the wild joy of living it recalled.

She was in grey the next time he saw her.

"Ashes?" he enquired.

"Yes,—of roses," she replied.

Now came the days when they met with a loud, bright pleasantness, affecting an interest in the scarlet salvias, or the blue jays darting through the pines, quite foreign to either under normal conditions,—days when their eyes never met and their topics were studiously impersonal, when their conversation was addressed to Grandee, and he became imperatively a factor in Trent's more frequent visits,—the medium through whom spirit found spirit and was momentarily unafraid.

The actual Trent was, as yet, to Stephanie only as the sea shell, through which a flood of lost memories poured in her ears and chanted of drowned beauty, and lost lives, and secret hidden treasure below the surface of the world. The poets of all time sang through his lips. She understood them now as never before. The Immortals spoke to her. He was saturated with all that was essentially lyric, but no glance escaped him that included her in his own joy of it all. It seemed to her he had the superb self-control of the great actor. He was either very deep, or very stupid. She did not believe him stupid,—therefore?—He became to her more and more a living paradox. To her own

audience she called him Prince Paradox. Again, she longed to get away from it all, to elude the Fate that seemed hovering, the inequality of the struggle, the embarrassment of the outcome, if it were to be an outcome beyond this state of nervous suspense. But Grandee was less strong and would miss her inconsolably, even if he did not refuse outright to let her away from him in Raleigh's absence. So here she was, and must stand, with no more hope of flight than that of a picket on duty. If Trent had been also a Catholic she might have imagined that some lapse, mental or moral, was being expiated. She would have been at loss to say to herself what,—

The first time they found themselves unavoidably alone after his outburst, was a twilight when he overtook her on her way to the hill from which her train was visible.

He had telephoned not an hour earlier that he could not dine with them, as he was going out of town. She would not admit that it mattered. Why should she care?

She started for her lonely stroll as usual, and met him at the garden gate.

"Were you just going out?" he asked surprised, knowing it was never her habit.

"Not immediately," she replied with a glance at her watch.

"Do not let me detain you," formally.

"No? You were not coming in, then?"

"No, I am just walking by."

"Oh, yes, on your way to Westerly, I suppose?"

It lay in the other direction and she knew it.

"Yes, I am only walking down your road. I mean I had no especial reason for coming this way."

"Then you will pardon me if I am not at home, — since —"

"Since I am not calling? Yes, certainly." Again she glanced at her watch. It was after five. The crickets sang loudly to suggest that evening was on the way.

"Were you going anywhere I was invited?" he asked, nettled by her haste to be rid of him. "Newbold always tells me if I am invited to anything. He did not speak of any affair to-day,—to my recollection. Yet I have a vague premonition —"

"You were asked to dine at Sky High, perhaps that was it?" she suggested.

"That could not have been it. That would have been a preferred engagement, not common stock,—beside, you are not going to dine at five o'clock!" he reminded her.

"No, I was going into the forest."

"Do you mind taking me?"

"I do not know. You were not very polite to Grandee, it seems to me."

"I was not rude," he explained eagerly, "because I did not mean to be. I am never unintentionally rude. When I am I mean it to be so understood, and I hate the creature who says,—he did not mean it,—never mind! Rudeness is the sharp weapon of a gentleman. It ought to be so understood in society. Grandee knows it. He never thought me rude for one instant!"

"But you hate Nature also, and in the forest to be content, one must love her —"

"Why do you never forget that? I only spoke of that brute of a bird that creaks so it wakes me up in the morning. I hate a person who remembers! I do not hate all Nature. I only hate talking about Nature. Everything has been said, and Nature is only lovely when it hints of the things we feel, and that is psychology. I will talk that sort of translation to you in the forest, with pleasure."

"Balzac does not recommend that topic to tête-à-tête, as a rule —" she objected.

"Every rule has its deception! Take me with you and I will prove it."

They walked fast, as people bent on a definite errand, then leaned against the bars at the end and yielded self to the spell of the October dusk. It was dark in the fields below them. Already the straight blue smoke from some tiny chimney, hinted of the labourer's return to his evening meal. The

dusk rose as a tide threatening to envelope them. She had grown silent. He had effaced himself as far as possible. A dog bayed in the distance, then all was still. The purple shadows lost their colour and groped as hands that are empty and seek to be filled with others empty as themselves. To her it should have brought an echo of universal "Angelus," yet she had never in all her life before known such an hour with a man beside her. The novelty of it kept sacred associations from her mind. How long the magic might have held them, who shall say, save that with a wild shriek, at frantic speed, the lighted train tore by. Stephanie shivered.

"I adore it!" she said.

"It means the city—to-night! I always want to go!" he answered.

"It is the world calling." She turned to go home as she said it.

"Do you feel that too? The passion of cities within reach to-night?" He saw by the tense restraint of her face that it not only meant as much to her as to him, but more,—oh, far more! And though she made no answer, he knew she had come here to-night from no chance, but oft-repeated, restless habit. It hurt him more than anything he had ever known a woman do. That night his new enemy, insomnia, got him, and he heard the two o'clock freight and the four o'clock milk train be-

fore he forgot to hope that she had not, and to remind himself that She, in this case, was another man's wife.

He wished himself a Catholic, that by saying a rosary he might be done with the cares of his day and sleep in peace while the Saints protected, or that he might buy surcease with a hundred repetitions of Hail Mary! He wondered if She was? But, by the contrariety of Fate, she was as it happened asleep with her head on the gently rounded arm of Morpheus, the arch coquette, who perhaps was breathing her own wavering arabesques upon her in dreams of wayward sweetness.

CHAPTER XVII

TWO BANKS OF A RIVER

THE more seriously Raleigh reflected on the incident of Father Mayhew, the less he enjoyed that innovation upon the orthodox calm of Sky High. He accordingly wrote to Stephanie, a letter of some length, just before his final break with civilisation and plunge into the woods,—a letter in which effusiveness was intended to smother a prohibition of the recurrence in his absence.

At his letter Stephanie had neither smiled or frowned—which is not the best omen for a husband's law or devotion. Steven Randall had also received a letter from Raleigh at the same time, peremptory in tone and baldly laying down rules and regulations for the conduct of his wife, as if Stephanie had been a child intrusted to him for training. To which Grandee replied, as befitted one diplomat to another, making no mention of the disputed subject, dwelling at length on his pleasure in Stephanie's companionship, but adding in the postscript so rarely found in the correspondence of untactful men,—

"Turkey insists on lighting and buoying the headwaters of the Gulf I am told. She has yet to learn evidently that you do not own a river unless you own both banks."

Which carried no special assurance of security to the man who read it in a double sense, as it was intended, and perfectly comprehended its import.

He estimated his wife's piety, like that of all young and charming women, as of a barometric fervour, to a certain degree depending upon other given circumstances. If he wronged her in his reduction of the personal equation, it was an injustice that, at least, gave him some degree of peace and satisfaction in his most unwilling exile. And whatever the other bank of the river at which Grandee hinted, he preferred it unhesitatingly to the wiles of the priest and the power of repeated confession, in which respect he resembled a multitude of martyred men since Christendom, tyrannically bent on possessing the individual being of the woman God gave them,—lest they be alone,—always reserving their own right to exclusive sovereignty of themselves, unquestioned and supreme.

Stephanie's nature was too rich on both the side of human longing and divine intuition, to confine her forever to either one life or the other. She might have lived for religion or pleasure with equal predisposition and not too much line of least resistance to overcome in either vocation. She had

no gift of abstraction. All she felt or knew came to her with the personal element uppermost and inevitable. Love or the Church might in turn present their claim to her, sure of consent, if her heart was captivated. Father Mayhew had found her no less sincere in her impulse for guidance that it was actuated by her tangled love affairs, and his absolution had been followed by a period of complete renunciation, which gave way, in turn, to another phase of life, temporarily driving all, save the mechanically repeated forms of her religion, out of her mind.

It is to have missed it all, for some women, if the brain has known no master. In the same sense that one may be mistress of a man's heart, so a woman needs the lover of her brain, whose mental intimacy contributes the subtle quickening to every common experience.

Stephanie and Trent talked of everything under heaven with a frankness that astounded them both. She might indeed have been the mere ghost of a woman she often insisted she was, or his grandmother, or another man, for all hindrance they met in free interchange of ideas upon all the most tantalising and impossible subjects. Whether they began in history or psychology, they always really talked about themselves, of course. They talked much of marriage,—ideal marriage and as it actually exists, and of the girl he would some time

marry. And they talked of her absent husband, as illustrative of general matrimonial tendencies, vaguely at first,—then more closely, until he and the shadow girl of Trent's future, assumed the proportions of a third and fourth party, turning their tête-à-tête into the safer "*partie carré*," under whose chaperoning re-assurance they dared an even closer intimacy of ideas.

"Christine has always said it would be nothing but hysterics, when I fell in love," Trent said, hovering near the thin ice purposely.

"One would have said asterisks, preferably," she returned, eyebrows slightly lifted in provocation.

"I think it is old fashioned to make love to women now-a-days. It seems to have gone by entirely. Men never tell women they love them,—"

"No? Then what is the American manner?"

"We tell them they interfere with our work,—or they make us nervous. It means ever so much more. Don't you think so?"

"It is very scientific, but I find it too little spirituelle. Love is for the soul, not the nervous system."

"Love is a rare bird! I was talking about making love, that is a pastime not a condition. I have never loved any woman longer than two weeks."

And she knew he had never loved before, and, beside what he felt to be her experience in that peculiar fever, was ashamed of his own uninfected

nature and assuming a past out of sheer emulation.

"One sometimes imagines that it would be easier to continue to love, if one promised not to,—it is so final, so in the past, to make a contract of one's sensations and then cease to be moved by any new emotion"—she complained.

"Daphne keeping house and forgetting how to run!" he chimed in gladly.

"Many times, if there was the uncertainty of love, there would be always the provocation. If one fears that each day may present a charm more gracious than one's own, one makes the effort to be desired, as at first,—but when one is sure, it is like the epitaph upon one's tomb, written forever."

"You do not agree with our American idea, that mutual confidence is the rock of married happiness and security?" he pursued.

"Of the institution of marriage and the family, naturally. I was speaking of love," was the swift answer. "You will understand better when you are married. She will be obliged to be a girl of most unselfish spirit to make your life brilliant, and never weary you. I shall love her for all she can be to you,—that I never could," she added, in response to his reproachful glance. He had come to all but dislike that girl. Her possibility got between them, for he knew she probably existed,

and at present he wanted to believe she did not.

But it was only to herself Stephanie added,—
“and for all she can never be to you that I shall have been, and yet may be!”

Then when he grew dreamy over that dim charm that was to draw him into newer toils in the blur of the future, she recalled him, by reminding him of her omniscient Balzac's saying —“men and women are simply pegs on which to hang an ideal!” —and for a week effaced herself, excusing her presence when he was at Sky High on one pretext or another, to heighten the truth of this sage impression, until a notice appeared in the columns of the local weekly newspaper, which forced her hand for fear of what further prank he might dare to play. It was inserted among the Lost Articles, with entire decorum:

Lost or Stolen.

A Peg, suitable for supporting an ideal of medium weight. Valuable only for association's sake. Finder will be suitably rewarded by returning to the owner after dark. No questions asked or answered.

C. I. RUINS.

Carthage in ruins, of course! Was there ever such a versatile rascal? And she could not refuse him, for Grandee had returned from a brief trip to town to see Doctor Wylin, and equilibrium was restored once more.

The autumn was doing its best to excite to human conflagration. Great fires leapt on the hearths inside, and outside the colour blazed and flamed and threw countless golden bonnets, not only "over the mill," but over all creation in an impartial delirium of recklessness. The days were pierced with a thrill to match the nights of frost. The hunter's moon was abroad, and the sound of nuts dropping through the darkness was as a stealthy footfall of approaching winter, or the slowing heart-beat of the year made audible. The gardens were blackened in a night, and scurrying shrouds of crimson leaves ran riot along the forbidden precincts, while Joel, with the real last judgment furor, cut and burned up, and covered over, glad to be done with the beauty and doubt of his long season. To Stephanie, the chill of autumn had always before meant the return to cities; the quickening spell of Paris, "first nights" at the theatres, the Salon, the shiver of the crowd playing upon her nerves, irritating and alluring by turn; the magic of lighted streets, the accumulated sense of humanity pressed close. Paris and love had heretofore been inseparable to her. Now, the alchemy of solitude and colour turned reflection in upon itself. The autumn here might mean nothing akin to its former significance, but might carry with it hearths aflame, reposeful embers glowing, encircling arms, and sleep illumined by dreams only less

ardent than reality,—love lived close in the flesh, clinging to its own in another, buried beneath the pall of silence, sequestered from all the world with “the hiddenness of perfect things.”

Suddenly one night, when Grandee was ailing and early gone upstairs, when the south wind and rain, coming at nightfall after a white frost, had wrapped Sky High in a winding sheet of gust and darkness, it happened, just as any one but either of these two concerned might have foreseen. There was no prelude. There was no precipitating event. There was no excuse. There could be no condonation. Without a flash of warning their arms were about each other,—his soft hair pressed against her own. No word was spoken, but she was sobbing like a desperate child, “You have broken my heart, Chéri, you have broken my heart!”

He only held her gently, firmly, as if defiant of all the united powers leagued to take her from him,—as if he had swept her from some hideous peril not yet past, to temporary safety. In their unbroken human silence the great wind leaned against the long windows as if to break through and set them free upon the night. She gradually released herself and drooped away from him down before the fire. Trent stood staring into the flame that burnt him; his face worn by suffering, tormented by regret and instant remorse. Sin

is so swift! Regret so long,—even eternal!

Stephanie's face was hidden in her hands. Through her mind ran the revelations of her consecutive disloyalty;—to Raleigh, to Grandee who trusted her implicitly with the honourable hospitality of his home, to her vows made so solemnly to Father Mayhew. Where were they all now? And why did they seem not to matter any more—unutterably vain—and of no importance,—of no connection with herself? Oh, why did they not leave her in peace, conscienceless, but only the Madonna knew how blest?

Trent, overwhelmed with a physical sensation of cold, threw himself down in Grandee's great chair, spent by his effort at self-control. He was bewildered but firm against further weakness. With an iron grip he held his senses in check, waiting for strength to leave, searching for the words in which to win her forgiveness for his appalling indiscretion. This was the end of course. There only remained to him to go,—if possible to go with her pardon.

He was almost sufficiently sure of himself to speak,—almost firm enough to risk leaving her with the formal expression of regret he was mentally framing, when she suddenly came to him and dropping on her knees beside him, hid her wet face on his shoulder.

Very reverently then he bent over her slight

form so shaken by its unbearable emotion, soothing her as tenderly as he knew how, begging her over and over not to cry; miserable for her and for himself.

She remained so, motionless, passionless until the sobs that shook her at intervals became less frequent, then she raised her head and for the first time they looked unflinchingly into each other's eyes.

"You are not crying now!" he sighed, infinitely grateful for her calm.

"Gaston!" she breathed back at him, her lips close to his own. He tried to turn his eyes away but he could not.

"Gaston!" she whispered again. "I am not crying if you care,—what is there then to cry about?" She knelt, gazing up at him, bewildered by what she saw. A rapt expression lit her face as the first coming of the dawn. "Is it true? Ah, *mon Dieu*, yes, it is true!" she cried, and flung her arms about him, lifting her lips to his trustfully as a child that has found the way home across a dark and alien world. It was a groan that escaped the man, as he answered her first kiss with his own. It was he who drew back, closing his eyes as he muttered, "Oh, God, why must a man live on after this!" But her arms clung about him and her vibrant voice declared bravely, "If you love me, I do not care for anything else

in this world or the next. If you love me, I forgive God the 'faux pas' of my existence. All is arranged satisfactorily between us, definitely, forever!" She was an amazing revelation to him, in her swift succession of mood, as she lavished her love upon him in her prodigal foreign endearment. Aghast, at first, at the situation he had brought upon them, who was he to resist her unnerving nearness, the caress of her magnetic fingers, the proud lips that murmured their humble need of his love so unreservedly? Her distrust of her happiness touched him more than all her self-revelation or avowal. She could not believe it,—until he drew her to him silently, with that possessive certainty speech can never gainsay. Then she rose and stood erect before him, as she delivered her own sentence, "Now, I have betrayed every one who trusted me, for you"—she said coldly,—“and you,—how you have made me suffer all these past weeks!"

"I am glad! I am glad!" he exulted, and again they clung to each other,

"Sight and speech extinguished, each on each."

"I am dead and buried. It is impossible. It cannot be true!" she reiterated, at last.

"There is nothing else true! Nothing!" he reassured her.

"But I am just a ghost—I am—" she could

not say married,—“It cannot be possible,” she repeated, transfigured if incredulous yet.

“Oui, c’est vrai, c’est vrai!” he insisted, kissing her words away and falling unconsciously into the language they both loved. Then, both in French, they began to whisper close, each to the other, insanely the stolen sweet—

“Je t’aime,”

“Je t’adore!”

Neither could breathe it often enough or hear it often enough. They were starving, thirsting for each other.

“Why would you never tell me?” she begged.

“I never meant to tell you, if I could help it.”

“I only thought of you as part of the colour and fragrance of the summer.”

“I will be that or anything else you like me for,—even the heat of summer,” he protested. “But I am dazed, of course, by the marvel of it all.”

“It was the fault of your mouth,” she said solemnly.

“It knows how to love!” He proved it to her.

“And that is all I know,—how to love,” she confessed.

“There is nothing else to know!”

Stephanie gave a little shiver of satisfaction, then she drew back, and shook her head sadly. “I do not believe it. It is not possible—” she stammered brokenly—“Since when, Gaston?”

"Since a long time, as the French say," he told her.

That was all, broken sentences, breathless exclamations, staggering sighs long prisoned,—no reckoning with past or future,—nothing but to-night and the forgetting that sundered them from reality. His self-control wavered under the frantic beat of her heart beneath his own, that gave him more than any word or caress, the truth of her surrender.

She hoped he would not come next day. It was too soon to banish the enamouring memory of him even by his actual touch. She dreaded him, and longed for nothing else but him. Cleverly as he had masked, untiringly as he had fenced, she had found his true self in the avowal she had so dreaded, so longed to hear. She could not meet him before Grandee,—and yet. She turned weak at the mere thought of the sight of him, a faintness overwhelmed her in anticipation of it. She crept off alone to the little forest. Her world was crashing about her. She could not understand or protest or reason. She could only run away like a silly sheep whose sole resource lay in an alert sense of danger. She did not want to think. She only wanted to re-live his voice, the pain and passion of their bodily swoon, his spirit breathing upon her soul.

When she saw him, out upon the highway with Newbold, the boyish arrogance of him was emphasised in every light motion of his faultless figure,—a figure carved in fervour,—and in the audacity of his grace, that old assurance, diminished of late in his uncertainty of himself and her, reasserting itself startlingly. He walked to-day like a young hero of mythology whose wings were momentarily folded while he trod the under-world to search its mysteries.

Newbold thought his manner a trifle too natural not to be over-done, but reminded himself that people who rarely are transparent, may happen to be what they seem, by chance, and so fool their friends both ways, and refused to allow the ulterior explanation his own mind afforded for this sudden, breezy cheerfulness on Trent's part. It was certainly intended to put him off,—but from what?

After three days of singularly unbroken communion with male society, Remmington spoke out. That is, he made the disconnected enquiry of Newbold,

“Is she still up there?”

“Saw her yesterday—”

“Then what the devil?”—

“Exactly.”

Which was how matters stood at the Squirrel's Nest. One afternoon some days later while a dis-

mal rain lashed the windows,—raining in a mere bleak fashion as if no longer jubilant at the havoc it had wrought,—Stephanie on joining Grandee in the library for tea found Trent there before her.

Her frock was sombre black, by chance. She saw Trent note it at a glance and augur from it. Their chat ran on, of everything save that of which each was thinking. Both vied to keep Grandee with them. He was their anchor, their lighthouse. They forestalled, as by mutual concern, each attempt at withdrawal, each suggestion of his afternoon nap, all repetition of Doctor Wylin's orders as to rest before dinner. At last their every effort failed. He was rising. He was leaving the room. He was actually gone. The shadows crept out of the corners and the light of the log fire burnished the friendly backs of the wise old books and flickered over the tea tray to the silver crucifix Stephanie wore on its emerald and silver chain.

Until the servant had taken the tray Trent chatted on nervously, as if he dared not stop. Stephanie had ceased talking or even listening. Finally he felt it and stopped chattering, smoking hard.

His determination to withhold himself was so open that she could not make the least effort toward resuming their interrupted relation. When the constraint grew intolerable he remarked, as if aggrieved by her unresponsiveness,

"I hoped you would be amusing this afternoon. I wanted to be amused."

She sat looking straight into the fire, one hand on her pearl crucifix. Her black frock invited the shadows, which at every moment enclosed her in a softer density.

"You have believed I would be able to be amusing? You have pulled my world down about me and you have believed it a comedy only? I do not comprehend you in the least," she replied gravely.

"We had better begin to put it back by treating it as one, had we not?" he asked, tentatively she thought, as if to try her.

"Myself, I do not know what there is to be done about it," she said, still pale and intent upon the fire, as if reading her fate in the embers. "I am not able to think any course out to the end. I have not slept well, and was obliged to assist all trains to mount the hill, during these last nights —"

"And I have not slept at all!" he broke in.

"Was it true, or were you lying to me?" she asked, as if inspired by a new suspicion.

"I did not lie."

"But you find it is not true,—that you have deceived yourself? It is no longer as it was then?" Inwardly she was shaking with terror of his possible reply.

"What about the ten commandments?" He attempted to put it jestingly.

“They are Jewish, intended only for the dirty wandering tribes who live in tents. They have nothing to do with our modern society,”—she qualified, with a shrug. There was no real alarm for his scruple now in her easy justification. Her first sharp recognition of her own disloyalties had been dulled, if not effaced by her desire that he should not take back what he had given. She rose slowly and stood in her familiar place by the fire, leaning a little, swaying slightly as she spoke, pleading for their right to love.

“I have repeated many prayers and meditated much, Chéri. After these so sleepless nights and days of waiting, this is my conclusion. If I can give you something of value to your life, is it not my best, my only power to live? And where is the fault? Even Father Mayhew would absolve for such an innocent indulgence. Also, it is out of my possibility to seek him now, for I am under perpetual if loving surveillance here, by anti-Catholic command. Grandee is too much a man of the world,—of my world, to condemn, and after, even he can perfectly remain in ignorance. The exactions of convention and good taste will naturally be strictly observed.” Her voice fell to a lower, more intense pitch as she turned to him now, saying rapidly,—“Imagine what love may be to us! I am so alone, so terribly alone! And is it not that a man succeeds twice who has the soul of a

woman to inflame his inspiration? Do you not go from me already, with twice the power of formerly? Is not life for us raised every day from the tomb? And why should we who have found this miracle possible to us, deny it to ourselves? What is there but love that matters anything?"

Still he sat rigid, silent, the tumult inside his heart keeping him externally calm.

"Love is a venial sin," she added softly.

It is the woman who is dare-devil in love, always. The man is bound to remember his standing among men. He shrinks from the world's censure, clings to his cover, shams, and is secretive long after she has escaped, as a glad and lawless pirate, on the high seas that are so surely to wreck her, and set her adrift as a vagrant uncharted derelict. Women are considered better than men but in matters of the emotions, men are, if not better, more far-seeing than women. Call it prudence or principle as it happens. Trent sitting shielded from the light in the angle of the chimney corner where she could not see his face clearly, knew this and clung to it blindly, although aware that he had allowed himself to be carried over the impalpable line that committed him to her by the standard of her world. "Don't you think we had better put it back?" he repeated. Plainly there was no question in his own mind. Already his course was decided and his will strong enough to hold him to it.

"But certainly, if you wish," she assured him quickly, with such contempt in her manner it made him shrivel.

"You despise me?" He looked straight at her now. She saw the shrinking in his eyes, that was not cowardice but pain and confusion of suffering. For a moment she pitied him, for his helplessness.

"The mistake is mine," she said gracefully, inclining her head as before a deserved correction. "I believed you a man—I find you an idealist or a Saint."

He arose to take his leave as if under condemnation.

"I regret to have disappointed you," he said with touching dignity. She put out her hand. He took it. Her mouth softened. He did not heed its suggestion. It was not until he was actually gone that she fully realised the humiliation to which he had subjected her. She knew herself unequal to sustaining the rôle he had created for her. To be the mystic ideal, the intangible spirit of his life, appealed to her no more than the wife of an absentee lord, like her own wedded husband. This was the end then. It was all over, finished, thrown aside.

Grandee fretted next day over missing his chess, but Trent did not appear.

Stephanie, with shaking hands, tore open a note

from him by the afternoon delivery, but it was only a sonnet, paradoxical as ever.

"Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part —
Nay, I have done, you get no more of me;
And I am glad, yea, glad with all my heart,
That thus so cleanly I myself can free.
Shake hands forever, cancel all our vows,
And when we meet at any time again,
Be it not seen in either of our brows
That we one jot of former love retain.
Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,
When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies,
When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,
And Innocence is closing up his eyes,
— Now if thou would'st, when all have given him over,
From death to life thou might'st him yet recover."

For some strange, inexplicable reason the sight of his odd handwriting renewed all that had sunk to ashes within her. He was temporising. And if a man will temporise with temptation, who better than a woman knows what it means or to what it leads? Perhaps it was not all over. Perhaps he too had been unable to refuse himself the possibility of reprieve. All her courage and confidence came back to her. It was with the recovered spirit of comedy he loved, that she wrote her first line to him since his return:

"Ultimatum received. Daphne running."

then ordered the car, and was driven to Westerly to telegraph it back to him. Trent received the despatch at dinner but did not open it until after midnight; omitting mention of it to the denizens of the Squirrel's Nest, who were celebrating their near departure by a bachelor frolic.

And that same night Grandee wrote to Raleigh Payne at some length, filling his letter with many details of interest to them both in a political sense, and adding again in postscript, enigmatic but entirely lucid to his astute nephew:

"Under Goluchowski Austria slept her time away, under Aerenthal she seems to dream it away."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WISDOM OF A DREAM

GRANDEE was giving a dinner in the superlative degree. The best lace, the heavily embroidered R on the linen, the heavily crested gilded glass, the gold enamel spoons and the reckless profusion of red roses all proved it. It was in honour of Christine, about to leave them for town, and Newbold and Remington had been persuaded to stop over and share this last reminiscence of the summer with the first snowflakes in the air, which for a brief silvery hour gave the world the effect of a "bal poudre."

Stephanie installed as hostess at one end of the table, glittered in a wondrous gown from Vienna, cut more décolleté than any she had ever worn for the previous simple grandeurs of Sky High. Trent, seated as far from her as the table permitted, heard her over and under the rest, though her voice was low, for her gay little heartless laugh ran along with her mood, and he found it quite exciting as a social game, to pretend to know what the girl next him was saying, and yet not to lose what Newbold was saying to Mrs. Payne to amuse her, or what she in turn, was saying or doing to make the stran-

ger on her right, a guest of one of the cottagers, stare at her with such open admiration.

He had branded the latter as no thorough-bred by the third course, for the way he was ignoring the girl beside him, and the disgusting obtrusiveness of his flirtatious intent. Newbold was too clever to give him the least advantage though, there was consolation in that certainty, and he inwardly cheered his friend on to be as brilliant as lay in his utmost power, and ward off the too appreciative stare, with which the other man was covering the woman desecrated by his enviable eyes. He came to himself to hear the girl beside him saying:

"Yes, she wanted me to help her with her girl's friendly. She opens it with prayer before the toe dancing. But I said the girls of the lower class had so much better time than the girls in society, I did not see the use. I am sure they have three or four men to play off against each other, and we are lucky to get one for the week end!"

"Oh, decidedly, a man's friendly would be more in your line!" Trent inserted, straining his will not to glance down the table for several seconds.

"I did try to help in the rescue mission but that has blown up, you know?" she volunteered.

"Why, I thought that was doing splendidly, what happened to it?" he asked as if it was right in his line of interest.

"Has nobody told you? Why the two women at

the head of it rescued each other's husbands! One drank and the other flirted abominably,—and now they do not speak!”

“And yet you women want the ballot!” he threw in, to keep her talking so he could eavesdrop satisfactorily.

“Oh, I am not a suffragette. I am an Anti-Anti,” she said. “That is really the only position for a lady, don't you think so, Mr. Trent? What do you think about it?”

“Me? I believe in equal suffering for men and women,” he assured her, allowing himself a quick glance toward Stephanie, beyond her.

“That would be the millennium, Trent,” said Grandee, laughing. “I wish we might live to see it.”

All but the trio at the other end of the table gradually joined in the discussion: Trent arguing amiably on both sides, or wherever the skirmish seemed to need re-enforcement, after his usual conversational irrelevance. Having started them all he was once more at liberty to realise without looking, that Stephanie had never been so attractive.

Grandee was talking to Christine of the local attempts at reform in their rural midst. “Socialism does very well in national administration, properly organised,” he was saying, “but these women here better let it alone. It is just a form of egoism

with them. People like our rival rescuers here, take it up because they are idle and happy, and there is another sort of women who take it up because they are idle and miserable. The latter succeed better on the whole, because they help themselves if nobody else."

The girl on Trent's right acted bored.

"It is several years since we met,—" she suggested. "It is odd you never married! You never did, did you?"

"Not to my knowledge," Trent assured her. "Did you?" She shook her head negatively.

"Mrs. Payne is not wearing her famous crucifix to-night, is she?" was her next remark, made with feminine irrelevance; intending Trent to notice her own jewelled chain of rare Florentine workmanship. At the word crucifix, Christine turned to Grandee.

"Have you any idea where I could get a cross something like that one of Stephanie's?" she asked. "I want one for a friend and I have hunted through all the antique shops I know, in vain. One old collector, after showing me everything else under the sun, confessed that people now-a-days like crescent and horse-shoe designs better. He added that there was no demand for crosses."

"I am afraid there never has been," said Grandee soberly, thinking of Stephanie and glancing at Trent.

"Oh, well, while we live let us laugh!" he responded, gaily —

"Or peradventure we may weep!" Grandee concluded. Trent's left-hand neighbour now projected himself into the foreground in turn. "Mrs. Payne is really looking rather well to-night," she commented. "Only she ought not to wear black. That is a mistake. It adds to her age so! Don't you agree with me, Mr. Trent? Black is for the very young or actual old. It should be avoided by women who are neither one or the other pronouncedly."

"It is said to be ambiguous," he returned, and looked past her, toward the Mrs. Payne of her dissection.

She who talked little with him, was now all badinage and raillery,—daring from time to time a "mot" rather out of the local genre; referring with a gesture to illustrations in French literature, apparently familiar to those beside her beyond need of amplification. He had never seen her use her hands with so foreign a freedom. They spoke in a language of their own, compelling constant attention. This was her element. He admitted it. How colourless their hours of reading together, and the sedate guise of friendship at first, must have been to such a woman! How she must despise him, when after coming to his senses and telling her he loved her, he had walked away from

the joy she offered him so unreservedly, with such touching confidence in him. Was he so immaculate that he must needs refuse her, in the misshapen loneliness of her life, any solace his love could afford her, without counting any cost to himself? If he had meant to fail her, why in heaven's name had he made love to her? And how superbly she had taken it;—however she must have caricatured him in her own thought. The champagne he was drinking helped his riot of unreason finely. Away with empty morality! Was there ever another such selfish fool? And so on, ignorant that rank jealousy was at work within him, not gentle charity or just self-examination. He forgot and looked once deliberately at her. She returned his glance over her glass for a long instant and the sensation went completely through him, hot and cold. He felt it to his finger tips. Of course she scorned him for a chilly, calculating prig. What had she wanted to do with him? Or have him do with her? But if he had acted in noble accord with his conscience, what man or priest would not have lost respect for a man who could refuse the gift such a woman offered him? He dared not look again all through the remainder of the dinner. She was branded already on his senses. Her throat, her curving shoulder thrown a little forward enhancing the soft undulation of her neck, and the delicacy of her bare arms in their

soft whiteness against the black gown, with a great red rose in her corsage, that would have been banal in any less exquisitely frail creature than she, but seemed on her the flaring flower of her own heart.

“See! I am Yusef’s flower! The red rose cried,
And wide and warm her sanguine bodice flings”

ran pitilessly through his memory, again and again.

He saw her hand stray to it several times, wondered if she could forget,—wondered if her heart felt no thorn,—knew that it did, and was glad!

When he listened again to the general conversation some one was talking of an absent notoriety, a playwright and mutual friend of all it appeared.

“I met him abroad in July,” a Boston man was saying,—a man of the gossip type, always looking up people and rehearsing their recent fortunes, a sort of animated “Who is Who.”

“He married Mary Swain, the widow of Percy Blythe, did he not?” asked the girl next Trent.

“Yes, it was an ill-omened marriage from the start,” some one else agreed quickly.

“Why?” inserted Trent, for the sake of saying something to show that he was in the circle.

“Because she was older than he. That never works out,” replied the Gossip, and then followed lists of unhappy Jacks and Jims and Percys who had tried it,—and supported his theory.

Suddenly Trent felt the inevitable settling down over him like an imagination of the hangman's cap. She was older than he in the experience that ages a woman most. She was dependent upon luxury, such as none but the rich and successful man could give her. Even counting out his own predisposition toward the scholar's life or the priesthood, her whim for him was nothing more than the caprice of a woman of society, in a moment of despair over losing temporarily the higher stakes in the glittering game of life.

"I do hope we are going to hear Mrs. Payne sing to-night. Have you heard her?" asked the girl, again interrupting him. "Are you musical, Mr. Trent? What is your instrument?"

"I play the golden lyre," he told her unblushingly.

"All the time?"

"No, because then it would cease to be that instrument and become truth. And life is so monotonous when every one goes about repeating the same things just as they are! It is mental photography, not art,—mere bleak repetition, hearsay still-born, like reading the newspaper aloud. The joy of lying comes from the common habit of truth."

As they left the table for the smoking room, he caught fragments of an unfinished discussion from the absorbed trio at the head of the table.

"If retribution came now, not hereafter, one might feel differently"—the stranger said, balancing the point, and Newbold finished it abruptly, saying as he drew back Stephanie's chair, "Oh, hell is the other woman!"

"Is it not possible that it can be the other man?" the stranger persisted.

"Myself, I do not know. I never love but one man," Stephanie said guardedly.

"At a time?" Newbold queried. It was hard, poor Trent swore to himself, to be forced to dive under the chair of that girl next him, at that very moment, in search of a missing glove, when he wanted to note Stephanie's expression. But man's lot is often doomed to just such tedious knight-errantry, unsupported by steed or lance.

He kept away from his hostess the rest of the evening, devoting himself ostentatiously to Christine's guests, and saying good-night with formal brevity in Newbold's wake. There was an ensuing complication of motors and carriages that carried them all together out to the porte cochère, but somehow Trent was left alone to drift back for his coat. Newbold had gone down with Christine's party to see them safely in. Remmington had walked on, supposing him arranged for in another car. He saw Grandee kiss Stephanie's hand with impressive appreciation and start up the wide stairway. There was no light in the library where she

stood, but that from the hall, and the fire on the hearth.

He saw her throw herself down in her usual chair with the familiar grace he loved. Quietly, without really knowing what he was about to do, he came to her, and leaning over the back of her chair, covered her hand with his own and kissed her like flame upon her mouth. He might hold out against her in absence but her presence captivated him against his will.

Then bending lower, he kissed the red rose she wore.

"Now I have broken every vow I made," he said firmly. "You can do about as you like with me. Let us talk!"

He dropped the cushions from the divan down beside her and seated himself at her feet, her hand still in his. A tense pause ensued, then he slipped one arm lightly about her. They sat so, while the fire absorbed their gaze in utter silence. Stephanie first gave a long sigh of quivering content.

"You are the music of silence," she said softly as if to herself.

Another long interlude unbroken save by the purring of the fire, as an adventurous flame reached to the heart of the great log and flared up ecstatically.

"Don't you hope heaven is like this?" he asked, as if merely continuing his own fantasy aloud.

"Why should one doubt it?" she ventured, her lips so close to his she could scarcely frame the words. She bent over him murmuring her insatiable question, "Are you mine, Chéri? Are you really 'mine?'"

"Yours!" he declared solemnly. But with the quick reactionary restraint she had seen before and dreaded, he drew back from the embrace that had all but enfolded them and closed his eyes. Was there something lacking in her charm for him? Had he perhaps a loftier conception of rapture possible to himself than any, lower than the supernatural, could ever afford?

"Why?" she cried, apprehensive of some mysterious change in him toward her.

"I am afraid of loving you too much."

"But of you I shall not demand anything. I am yours to do with as you will,—and after,—nothing. Absolutely nothing!" It was a simple statement of fact, no protestation. He knew it. Stephanie sat wondering. "Truly you are a man," she said reflectively. "I give you passion and you blanch away from it. I give you indifference, as to-night at dinner, and you retaliate with this. Yours is the most sensuous soul and mystic sense conceivable. You must at times, I am sure, be confused to decide if you are reptile or angel."

"To-night I must be an angel, for this is heaven," he reminded her. "And I am sure God

must be pleased with us now, I am so content."

"You are very strange, Gaston. What has changed you? You thought not so long ago love was a sin to be resisted, and not sufficiently charming to hazard the possible punishment. And now?"

"I was sure it was a sin at first. I swore it should stop, and then I was afraid it had. And all the while I was away, I nearly died of loneliness without you, and when I was on my way to Canada to camp with some men and forget you, I saw you waiting for me, through that infinitely blessed car window, and went after you without so much as my coat, left hanging on its peg. And you never noticed that men do not usually travel with one glove and nothing in the way of luggage, not even an umbrella! And now I am unhappy because I know such happiness cannot last."

"And now you think also that it is no longer wrong?"

"And now I do not care if it is!"

"How strange—" she began.

"It was strange,—it is not any more. It is simply irresistible."

She wanted to accept it as final, but this was to-night, and Stephanie knew that to-morrow would not be the same. She comprehended his nature too well to count on continuity of passion. And even now, having soared to his zenith, he dove away

from her and took refuge in the flippant commonplace.

She listened as he criticised Grandee's taste in placing a random stranger next her at table that evening. "He is not a gentleman, of course," Trent haughtily announced, "for he asked who you were, yesterday in the village. No gentleman would do that. Newbold and I never did. We only told Christine and Jim that we did not mind coming to tea with them some afternoon when you were there."

"Oh, you precious ridiculous! But how did you know who sat by me, or what he was like? You devoted yourself to Christine's friend so exclusively—" she inferred her own consequent exclusion by a shrug.

"Did I? I am glad. I had not noticed it."

"And that Mallory woman on your left was very handsome."

"And like a grand piano,—shut,—to talk to. Your gown was at fault too. I found it—"

"All that it should be?" she asked anxiously.

"More! But you were quite shameless in the way you effaced all the others. I honestly pitied them."

"Is it possible you saw it? You never for but one instant turned your eyes in my direction."

"I was afraid," he admitted gravely. "I am always afraid of Newbold's eyes. They see when

one least expects them to. Grandee has very shrewd eyes too, sometimes. And you are a very terrifying person yourself in society. I feel when I look at you, it cannot have been true: it never was true; that I am just one of 'les autres.' ”

“Grandee trusts me entirely,” she said hurriedly, slurring over his compunction. But it did not ring true. They both understood the falseness of their position and suffered from it, not only for each other, but for the personal loss of self-esteem it involved.

It was characteristic of Lawrence Trent that he could not stay pitched in one key. Tragedy was not his taste, however it might prove to be his fate. Tense as they both were to-night, he was obliged to follow the law of his nature and slide down a semi-tone, a whole third, an octave even, by his trifling, to avert disaster. He could not bear the sustained realisation of the pass to which they had inadvertently come.

“You did amuse yourself, you will not deny?” he insisted.

“Can it be possible that you were jealous?” She was all dubious instantly.

“Newbold is very attractive and, as I have told you before, every woman likes a new victim.”

“He is brilliant,—but not contagious,” she discriminated.

"I did not mind. I rather enjoyed it. It is more fun not to be certain of anything."

Stephanie recoiled. He felt it.

"You say it is fun,—more fun," she remarked sharply. "I have been false to a man who loves me, for you. I cannot conceive of pretending to give a moment's consideration to another man. It is degrading. To so much as glance with coquetry at another man is to declass oneself; it is vulgar, plebeian. I shall never stoop to subterfuge or art with you. It is not great or splendid. You have it always in your power to humiliate me, by recalling that I have been at heart unfaithful to Raleigh Payne, but you should be the last man in all the world to inflict such disrespect upon my sacred misfortune in loving you!"

It was an unexpected depth in her, disconcerting perhaps, but promising much for the clarity of her affection, and boding ill for the complexity of the relation he had involved them in. Hidden, holy, hopeless as it was to him, he could not have defined, even in her arms, if he really would have wished it otherwise. It so suited his vague need of loving and being loved, without personal responsibility, or the cross of conflicting mutual obligations of duty-imposing love under normal and regular conditions.

A clock struck one.

"It is nothing to you! You have nothing what-

ever to say about it!" Trent contradicted whimsically. "But I have got to go home sometime,—I suppose." He unfastened the red rose from her corsage and slipped it safely beneath his coat. His last kiss was sacramental,—an experience of infinity in which all sense of self went down.

She lay quiescent in her deep chair before the fire, after he had gone, unwilling to break the enchantment of his spell.

She wondered later, what lie he would offer Newbold in extenuation of the hour. She fell asleep there at last, and dreamed. The dream shut her in a room, like one she had occupied in Heidelberg, where moon-beams sifted through chestnut trees in bloom and made feathery shadows trembling on the wall. The mountains rose sharply outside a window by which some one stood. She heard a door drawn softly shut. As it closed, she turned, but perceived it to be Raleigh who stood beside her,—and knew it to be Trent who had closed the door and stood outside.

She waked sickened, with a physical sense of chill, just as the Centaur freight train raced wild down the steep grade. The pang that smote her revealed their situation. Her heart seemed to stop. The dream outraged her soul and body. She wanted to pray. The future leered at her from the darkness. Even the echo of the familiar train had vanished into the unknown.

CHAPTER XIX

THE POSTMAN

ON the desk in Stephanie's own room lay the usual elaborate writing contrivances monogrammed and crested, for Raleigh was fond of the Payne crest and liked to see it reappear, repeated in varying form, under any pretext. It gave him an ancestral feeling, a new young dignity to offset her Austrian background. His own picture, in a heavy silver frame, also correctly monogrammed and crested, stood appropriately in the midst; surrounded by many small but significant trophies connected with their courtship, which he liked to see about her. It was, however, at the small mahogany table in her dressing room, by the window overlooking the narrow strip of forest and the edge of the lawn, that she spent her long solitary afternoons of summer and the brilliant chill autumn mornings. Here were Trent's careless notes,—mere little bundles of faggots she told him his writing resembled; and here were also the books Trent brought her to read and the flowers he cared for. That was all. She had an aversion to any tangible proof of devotion, because of these very accumulated gifts of Raleigh, which

dragged on her memory like manacles, bidding her mind guard what her heart had long loosed.

"Give me only that which cannot last!" had been her entreaty of Trent. "Give me, if you will, a flower, a thought, a tear,—the joy I do not see or touch,—that I shall not be obliged to behold it with sharp regret at some future time,—recalling that which I most wish to put far from me. A gift, Chéri, so soon becomes the symbol of an experience that is dead. And one cherishes the body of the dead but three days, however beloved, so why then preserve the dead form of a love that has vanished?"

But to her the room was full of Trent. For here were her conjectures, her fears, her brief memories; clinging like incense undisturbed in some holy place. He had never been here of course, but he seemed to Stephanie never to have been away. And here she always found him. It was a northeast room, which perhaps accounted for the rather pensive romance of the shadows across the summer grass, or the autumnal feeling that summer had turned her face away, which came later as the season deepened into earlier dusk. All the gates of summer seemed closed behind them now and locked in frost, yet no letters came from the North Woods and every day sped faster than its predecessor, while the wasting November prophesied the end in pitiless terms of dun-colour.

Every day too, Stephanie and Trent might have asked with the divine old poet —

“What did we do i’faith, before we loved?”

so absorbing had not only that occupation, but their necessary precaution to conceal it from others, become. He must have known that she was his, to take or refuse. He gave her his love in his own pent, cruel, silent way, most often against his will, but he would never promise or beseech. It was left to something outside themselves to determine their destiny.

A perplexity as to the extent a lover is prepared to support his protestations is the most absorbing preoccupation a woman can have. And if he does not protest, merely assumes, the perplexity is doubled. Stephanie followed her clew till it began to mislead or she began to run ahead of the actual scent of fact,—then went back, to avoid the misty turning between truth and her desire for what should be truth, to again find herself confronting one result at one minute, and its exact opposite the next. She knew her own sickening predicament by that vivid dream.

“If I am tempted to let Raleigh come back, I shall live over again that terrible instant!” she reminded herself. “I have only in imagination to feel my heart stop, as it did when that door was

shut, to realise all the future." It shocked her to recall that intimate moment,—even in a dream. She had expected, without too much struggle, that all would externally remain as before. It would look like purple and feel like treason, but that was one of the world's accepted compromises. Now it became revolting physically as well as morally. She cried out to be saved from such catastrophe, but the prayers of "the Way of the Cross" were for those who approached by renunciation of their sinful desires. And to renounce her love was not in Stephanie.

Yet how was she to pray? How could she beg of the implacable God to make her lover true, when she was false?

"C'est ridicule,—ma position!" she cried in her heart. "If heaven had not such an infinitely narrow conception of a woman!" "To be a Madonna is but one career, justly!" "And surely a woman of society has need of God, more than some innocent virgin of the peasantry! But how to pray? To pray that he might sleep and dream of her? What rosary held a petition like this? To pray that he might come without fail, to-morrow as always? Could the Almighty Judge turn from his divine rehabilitation of fallen mankind and re-introduction to fitness for eternal glory, long enough to send Trent to her, with kisses smouldering on his lips and the light of passion hid so deeply

down behind his eyes? No, surely not. The bon Dieu must be too occupied sorting his goats from his sheep." She was left to renounce all carnal joys and earthly vanities unassisted.

It was just here that Raleigh's prohibition of the confessional infected her, and even spread beyond her to the demoralisation of Trent himself. The ambition that saw in her relation to the priest a menace to a phase of political activity, failed to foresee the safeguard against the insidious lure of love-in-loneliness. Stephanie reasoned that if her religion failed her now, it was good for little. If heaven would not help her now, for what use was it intended? She knew Trent prayed for her. He was so good! Found such peace in his Mass,—looked so rapt afterward! His prayers surely must surely be heard, yet for what did he pray?

That she might be faithful to her marriage vows? Hateful!

That she might be too pure to love out of the sacrament? Odious!

Once he had said on leaving her, "Now one long wicked kiss!" And with all her small strength she had held him back.

"Not if you believe it is wicked," she had insisted. "I want to be holy to you,—first in your prayers as in your passion." She wanted more, in reality, she wanted to be his peace and passion. She was jealous of his goodness. "This affair of

his soul with heaven!" And he had overpowered her, of course, and whispered as he kissed her, "Oh, you are, you are first! I do not care how wrong it is! I am all past that!"

They were at sea, poor children, equally.

"All my vows broken!" she heard him sigh; and again when she asked him hesitatingly, "Do you mind if I care so much?" he had replied, as if oppressed, she thought, "I do not mind anything now."

But she was forced to feel it a desperate acceptance of their intimacy, on his part, rather than any elation of happiness or personal triumph.

Sometimes he reverted to his original pose, saying quietly, as if he meant it, "I hate you."

"I detest you," was her invariable reply.

To which he would always retort, "I abhor you, —because I adore you!"

"I have never asked you the only question that I must ask soon," she said to him once, and he cried impulsively:

"Leave it unasked! I hate questions," as if he foresaw a change impending in their relation and wished to ward it off by affecting not to see it.

"I must ask it"—she repeated steadily.—"Do you love me?" She felt how he grew tense, then relaxed as if from the joy of a danger threatened and passed.

Were they the frail bands of indomitable conscience, or the pale hope of some remote eternal bliss that so militated against her?

They were not happy and yet they could never go back the way they had come, even if it had occurred to either so to desire. And every day the mail came up to Sky High, bringing a quicker terror to her heart for their diminishing safety. Sometimes the impending danger made her tremble so that she feared detection from menial eyes, and took a glass of wine before she ventured to meet what might be lurking in the postman's hand. At other times she fell upon her knees, whispering wildly to the unmoved crucifix above her head, "Have mercy! Have pity! Not to-day! Not to-day! Not yet! Give me courage! But not to-day!" Or merely repeated a few beads, distracted and unheeding; an unintelligent form of signal for help, like that of a drowning man without proper rockets to call other ships to his succour before he sinks for the last time.

Trent took more wine at dinner than had ever been his habit before. He had to. It dulled the call of the nerves or made him indifferent toward inward remonstrance. To Stephanie he was an increasing enigma. She perfectly recognised his being bound by every obligation of manly honour to make no least demand of her. Yet — if he only would! She had the woman's appetite for self-

sacrifice, regretted his inadequate tyranny, doubted her own charm. What if she failed to arouse a passion sufficiently enduring and inexorable? She knew there were lures before which men were weak. And did men who really lived the lives of men, ever allow honour to tie their hands to the exclusion of inclination? She was a woman bred to a different code. The fine edge of the blade of an American's honour with women was out of her reckoning by no fault of her own. She had yet to learn that it takes more power to swerve an American from his straight and narrow path of the married sanctities, than to keep him in it. The reverse may hold in Europe, but here the line of least resistance is decency and the respect of women, with an old-fashioned awe of a certain commandment Moses and America have gone into partnership on, in spite of lax divorce and the millionaire minority.

If Raleigh came before Trent further committed himself, and if the supernatural could not be prevailed upon to assist her, where was she to find succour? No prayer and no exit came to her troubled suggestion.

She clung, for her single hope, to the only hint of her definite salvation Trent had ever cast out. It was but a brief exchange of sentences, that might have been idle words unsupported by any definite resolution.

"Raleigh may go to Panama, indefinitely," she had thrown out, meaning separation.

"Let him!" Trent replied savagely.

"But you will not let me go with him?"

"Never!"

"Do you care more than you did?"

"I do not see how that would be possible."

It was all she had for a spar in possible shipwreck, and she was not so infatuated as to trust too implicitly to its endurance under stress and storm. Before her dream she had tried to say to herself that Raleigh was hers, and proud of her; he moved on the stage with assurance, never lacked dignity or claimed from her preposterous satisfactions: that her own tact would be equal to whatever complication arose. He and she, whatever there might lie concealed between them, understood each other's love of effect and the strategic position. But now, since her dream, the repulsion of the flesh made him impossible.

Raleigh had bought her, bargained for her. He did not love her for love's sake. She had never felt more than an attraction of the flesh toward him, disgraceful as it might be. And yet he was her husband and the postman would come some day,—until when—here her argument broke down. So every day she waited and dreaded, and every day it had been put off once again, and she grasped the cup of reprieve with fingers that shook,

her spirits, soaring. There was never comrade so gay,—until the ghastly dread took hold of her again, at sight of the grey-uniformed Fate, posting up to Sky High on his next round; impartially scattering tragedy and comedy from his un-classic motor-cycle, all unsuspecting of his potential importance to the peace of the pretty Mrs. Payne he admired without limitation.

Trent, meantime kept desperately at his books, never sparing himself, taking her quite by surprise one morning by his announcement that he was off to town for a few days. Conjecture could not supply his motive, and his reticence was cloaked in that appearance of frankness, already so familiar to her in his evasive moods.

“Must you go now,—just now?” she said, trying not to let her voice sound imploring.

“I have decisions to make, people to see, important matters to arrange,” he explained with an inclusiveness intentionally misleading.

Her heart took fright at once. After all he was one of these self-centred Americans, who allowed neither love nor inclination to cross their deathless determination to advance.

“We have so few days left —” she faltered.

“But we have had so many!” he exclaimed happily.

“How long shall you be gone?”

“Not more than ten days.”

"Ten days!" she stammered,—*"ten days — but I shall be so miserable —"*

"If you will not look like Durer's Melancholy, I will make it two or three," he offered, enjoying her confusion.

"Why do you persecute me so with the fear that you are already weary?" she demanded, her small head thrown back, her hands tragically out-spread.

"Because you are so simple in spite of all your subtlety."

"We are all simple when we love. But, Chéri, I am not like other women in one respect, I care only for what is mine. It may not be noble but it is, alas! also true."

"That is a singular virtue. Most women care for nothing until they have lost it," he complied.

"Yes, and for this reason it is not necessary for you to absent yourself and be lost to me, to make me love you. I shall love you a thousand times more if you will not go. You will not? You will give me these few days more?"

"Oh, no, I am going. I said I was, and I have written other people so," he asserted quite undeterred. Instantly she was all dread of his leaving her, felt the premonition of the hours without him, struggling to remain calm externally.

"You will send me a little word to-morrow?" she begged, intent on forestalling the impending blank, before which she already quailed.

"Impossible! I could not write you now," he said, "my words would burn through the paper and set the mail bag on fire!"

"I so loved your notes last time you were away; but especially I loved your telegram," she derided fondly, "the one you promised to send on arrival, and did not remember to send at all."

"Promises are only good to break," he objected.

"If all the world so regarded them—" she began —

"Put me in a class all by myself, in that respect, then," he invited her unblushingly. But she sighed quickly. "Alas! then I am obliged to place you in a class together with all the men I have ever known in my life. I had hoped you were unique. And if you do not believe in truth, in what do you believe supremely, profoundly, Gaston?"

Trent resented her insight and appreciated the implication of her reproof, but he kept that to himself, saying with a sudden bitterness that shocked her,— "I believe in the love-neverlasting, destroyer of heaven and earth!" Then, turning his head aside, while she noted the rigidity of his face and its unnatural pallour, he muttered, "It will not last,—it cannot last. It never does, and each time brings the end closer." She tasted the challenge to fate in his kiss and gloried in it, but her impotence to turn him from his proposed journey to town was like a hand at her throat. She would

not let him see her real suffering over so slight a difference, but her heart went white within her. He noticed her loss of colour and irregular breathing, and coming back to stand beside her, laid his arm about her shoulders fondly, as he comforted her by saying, "Think what a pleasure it will be to come back!"

She forced herself to share his mood, not daring to oppose her own lest it annoy him; arguing only with reluctant eyes. They both felt vaguely that there were things which probably ought to be said, but they did not want to say them; though by this very assuming of their non-existence they realised and evaded the possibility of raising an issue. Such a mutual ignoring became a bond of avoidance, uniting them in a common effort. Panoplied in their now recognition of the situation as an open fact between them, they could sit now talking of everything and anything else, while the reckless ghosts of former hours revelled, mocking at them from each other's arms, filling the room with phantom echoes of sighs and love-words, pitiless, tormenting, distracting by comparison with the undemonstrative present.

Their actual parting was tense, a silent, white Mass, partaken side by side. Mystics, dreamers, they both were; Fate might well laugh at their doubt of any power to destroy what lay between their eyes and deeper than touch. Their individ-

uality complicated an otherwise simple outcome, by their obstinacy in blessing God for each other. Trent, in his first grim struggle with the element that has worsted saint and hero alike, was constrained to reconcile Deity with the sanction of his love, which Stephanie took for granted. To her the "bon Dieu" was marvellously making reparation for all that had hitherto been lacking in her life. The strength to resist weakened with every fresh persuasion in each other's favour. There had come to be for both an inexpressible dearness in their association, which set each secretly wondering if in any constant association of a man and woman who loved, one might not pretty safely rely upon a wide margin of totally inexplicable fascination, after all. As Trent wandered up and down the dreary platform of the junction station to-day, he wondered why it had seemed so attractive in the gathering dusk with Stephanie. He recalled the hat she wore, her eyes that set him imagining, and her tempestuous lips that let him know. Where was that giddy spirit of joy to-day? Then and Now, that oldest of all tragedies of man, was being again enacted in all its tiresome sameness, only that it was within him, a matter of his own individuality.

In the writing room of a certain down-town caravansary, that same evening in New York, a

man very brown as to complexion and well developed of muscle sat writing as fast as his pen could fly. The capital letters were large, denoting self-absorption, and the rest of the words were carried to their end by sheer momentum. To one accustomed to his hand, what he wrote, however little it might look like it, was really intended for —

Darling Stephanie:

Feeling like a fighting cock. Got in this afternoon and must stay here over to-morrow for a business conference of importance. Expect me at Sky High in a few days at latest. The city is dull enough without you. Greetings to Uncle Randall,

Your aff. husband,

RALEIGH PAYNE.

This done he gave it to a page to mail, and hurried off to dine at Christine's and go to the first night at the opera, in the box of another friend later. And upstairs in the same hotel, it happened, a boy sat trying to write a letter of farewell, trying to bear the nameless pain that enveloped him like some deadly mist and gathered in his throat and choked him. At last, he tore all his attempts in fragments and going to the telephone called up Western Union.

"Take a message, please, and get it sent at once, will you?" he called and then dictated word by word:

To Mrs. Raleigh Payne,

Sky High,

Four Roads, New Hampshire —

City glorious. Off to play, no time to write. Love to Grandee. "On with the dance"!

L. T.

And then he sat down and burying his head on his arms shook like a man in ague from the effort not to sob. And it was not till afternoon, following a night that brought no counsel, that he returned hastily to Sky High, without having accomplished all of that important business he had declared as his object in coming.

Stephanie had waked and dreamed the night away by turns, not neglecting the call of the two o'clock freight or the four o'clock express. At intervals she counted the hours until she had him back. That he might not come had never occurred to her. Grandee talked delightfully at dinner, of the vulgarity of cities, of the modesty and charm of the country to natures fine enough to appreciate its distinction of silence and space. It reassured her soothingly. Terrified as she always was by the thought of any woman attracting Trent, any girl charming him by contrast, it comforted her to remember how banal and unsympathetic the glare and crowds must seem to him, after their hidden life together here. It had been a monstrous

risk to run, she admitted, but he would come back more hers than ever. The agony she suffered in the dread of his leaving her would be assuaged, at least for a time, in his gladness of return. She went over all the circumstances that might be safely calculated upon to detain Raleigh. Trent and she had a little longer,—and one of them might die before the end,—who could say?

At dawn she told herself she should see Trent before another day, and waited with steadier fingers than she had boasted for a long time, as the postman came up the hill. He found her waiting for him, with gaunt trees high above her, pacing the icy terrace, with a shine in her eyes to rival the glitter of the scene about her. He delivered both letter and telegram, after the local fashion,—the operator having been called away to a funeral and, seeing there was no hurry from the contents, not choosing to take the trouble to call up Sky High for its transmission.

. She managed to smile and thank him, to even comment on the beauty of the ice-storm, then she lost herself in the desolate little forest, to read what she had always known must come, yet never believed could.

CHAPTER XX

AN ISSUE EVADED

STEPHANIE still held the letter and the telegram in her hand when she regained her own room an hour later. Life sickened her. She turned from Grandee, whose kindly soul had ministered and guarded so faithfully. She did not want to be saved from herself or her sin or her love. Deeper than those fangs of pain at her heart was her vivid consciousness of the sweet smile that grew so cruel, and the cruel heart that was once so sweet. She was the victim of her own nature: too true to covet a new love, too satisfied to crave other satisfactions or distraction. She had given Trent all, from her soul's secret dim corners, and if he could not accept these conditions, she was too utterly robbed to begin again. She stared about her. Was it all true? Had it come to this? Those pictures of Christ in the chapel windows, and at the shrines of the convent,—did they all mean suffering? Were they after all something that stood for more than an incensed vision? And was God a force with whom she, Stephanie, must reckon? She, whose mother's name was Pleasure and whose father's stricken from the family rec-

ords? Was God going to judge her, here and now? Was she facing inevitable law and punishment before death, like those miserable Old Testament people she ignored? Here, now, with no priest to intercede for her with the Saints? Was the renunciation of the Imitation compulsory, not the tranced exhortation of a monk? Was it true that she, Stephanie of the long mirrors and those dashing Viennese streets, the Stephanie of salon and ball room, was she to be brought face to face alone, with sacrifice of all she loved and desired? It could not be! There must be some way, some expiation that could make black look white enough to pass! She had found what she supremely wanted,—and it had brought her desperate inward desolation, to rend her, with ghastly doubt laying siege to her soul, and a chaotic uncertainty of any design anywhere that included her. She had defied God, neglected the laws of her religion, and this had come to pass. Yet she had asked so little of God! Only some one to love and to love her! Only a boy's soul!

From the north window of her room she gazed hopelessly out at the slender denuded birches, leafless and uninspired. It was a Boecklin landscape hinting of conclusion, death, and doom even. The hills in the cold December light were sharply lined as a steel engraving, solemn as a passage of Scripture. Seen behind the shivering virgin birches

they seemed as the encircling Greek chorus, about to warn of impending tragedy.

Raleigh would be there to-night. Trent was gone. What was she to do?

"I am Raleigh's wife,—I am his wife," she whispered to herself. "He has the right to do as he wills with me. And I love life so that I have not the force to destroy myself. No, it is not that I love life; it is another man. I will not live with Raleigh! And I have not money enough to go away and live abroad,—and my lover is an American, with all that signifies, and he has a career too, which he loves best in the end, and a horror of irregular relations with a woman. But he is mine! He swore it. He is myself, and if a man loves a woman he will kill her before he will let another man take her from him. The test of a man is what he will fight for. There may not be any God, but there is love, and there is the man I love. And if he loves me he must want to keep me from Raleigh!"

But she had not the consolation of an ignorant faith in men, and even as she said it she was terrified, for she knew it was not inevitable, it was not even probable in a thousand proven cases. A train whistled at the crossing. Her eyes flashed. Of course, that was it. That would settle it all. She would go to town under any pretext and see Trent immediately. How soft his hair was! "Mon

Dieu! how I have suffered without him!" she sobbed. Something relaxed within her and for the moment she was mercifully forgetful that Trent had a career and she, incidentally, a husband.

She forgot that while she had waked and waited Trent had gone gaily to the play, by his own telegram's admission. She was blind to all but the vision she loved best, the feeling of his arms about her, his breath in her own. For the instant nothing was true but this,—after the manner of women who shun truth when it lights an unwelcome face.

The stamping of the horses at the door interrupted her sharply. They were waiting as usual at this hour, part of the orderly habit of the house, the luxury of service and the smooth gliding machinery of the rich establishment,—all that she meant to put behind her if she left Raleigh. How often she had sent the coachman back! But to-day he was here as punctually as if she had always allowed him to serve her. She put on a soft fur hat and long fur coat, and went hastily up to the Eyrie, on the next floor, where Grandee lived all day until dinner time.

"Going out with the horses? I am so glad!" he encouraged cordially, as his glance fell upon her furs.

"Yes," she said, laying her hand on his, "I am going to New York for a few days, Grandee. I have just decided it, in a real American hurry!"

Instantly his gaze penetrated her, though all he said was:

"Not alone?"

"Alone," she replied, and he might have caught the peculiar tensiety of her emotion by the set expression of her mouth, if he had needed additional revelation of something amiss.

"Is not this rather sudden?" he asked.

"Yes, a little sudden," she said quietly.

"Has Raleigh telegraphed you to meet him, instead of coming up here?" It occurred to him as possible that this had happened, and she had resented its lack of deference, though acquiescing in its demand upon her.

"No, but I thought I would," she said, as if it was a perfectly ordinary move on her part instead of being distinctly extraordinary.

"Is it a surprise you are giving him?"

"Perhaps."

"He will be here almost at once unless he has changed his programme. Are you sure you will catch him in town? I should not like to risk your arriving alone, with only his secretary to look after you. Of course I can notify Christine, and she will take you in, but still — if you are going down on the notion of meeting Raleigh, it would be better to make sure of his plans first, unless you really want to make a lover's meeting of it?"

She delayed over the chance he was giving her

for cover, but refused it, to say, "I would rather not trouble Christine."

"But if you are going down to meet Raleigh,—"
he hesitated and their eyes met. "Are you going down to meet him — Stephanie?"

"No, Grandee, not to meet him." They looked the issue straight in each other's eyes then without swerving or blinking it.

"I will not meet him, yet. I cannot," she said coldly.

"And I as your host and protector cannot let you go," he replied as if he really regretted his inability.

"Then, much as I must regret to do so, I am obliged to go without your consent."

Again they faced each other, and each understood in silence.

"I did not come to ask your consent, Grandee, I came to inform you of my intention only, and to say adieu,—nothing more. I need not have told you, but I find it beyond my power to leave you without a word,—to so fail in amiability after your uncounted deeds of affection, your hospitality, your gentleness,—I could not go away like that!"

"Even though you knew I should not allow you to go?"

"Yes, even though I was sure you would not prevent me when you understood my position; for

I have known, a long time, that you have seen and have not blamed altogether, for sake of the pity you also felt for me." Randall's face was as full of suffering now as her own, so full of sympathy for her that her lips suddenly lost their line of pride to the common curve of waning self-control. She blinked her long lashes skilfully, hoping he had not seen the tears that clung there. But already his frail hand was on hers and the trembling of her own shocked him out of all conventionality.

"What has happened, Stephanie? What do you mean to do?" he begged her gently. "You are not well, dear, your poor hands are icy cold."

"I am so weak!" she protested petulantly, "and yet my father before me did what I am doing. It is in my blood, I am not one of your American Amazons! I cannot do anything but love. That is my sole 'metier.' Please, Grandee, if you love me a very little, let me go—" trying to draw her hand from him as she spoke,—“It is no matter what happens to me now. I am just one more woman among the thousands who curse the day they were born. I only want to be permitted to go away for a little quite alone, and perhaps Father Mayhew can tell me what to do. I shall send for him at once. You know Raleigh prohibited his coming to me here. A Catholic without her confessor is as a ship at sea without a captain.”

"No married woman needs a confessor to repeat her duty toward the man whose name she bears," said Grandee, trying to be stern.

"You forget, Grandee," she said wearily, "that I am as I told you, weak. I have not of the character, as your Christine understands it. I am weaker than other European women even, by the facts of my birth. I am only strong where I love, and I do not love Raleigh Payne."

He took it without demonstration of any sort, still holding her as if he feared she would disappear in spite of him. "Listen, Stephanie," he urged. "When a woman is guided through life by her head and her heart, her love burns as a pure flame, giving light and warmth, but when her sense and head guide her, the fire she generates is apt to be a destroying fire, leaving blackness in its course. Sense in predominance, without head, cannot be other than false to all high destination, for it lures only instincts of the flesh, lowest in the lower animals. It is left to sense, directed toward its prey by brains, to undo and pervert all the angel in man, under cleverly devised sophistries that are traps, and excuses that do not excuse, that arouse and never satisfy, stimulating imaginary desires that are fiercer than normal realities. The heart is a good woman's stronghold. The senses are a bad woman's invincible army. Sense is the kingdom of the courtesan and the subtlest

danger of the lonely woman, or the woman whose powers are unemployed. I realise —”

But she heard the horses stamp impatiently. She was insane to be gone. That was all.

“Forgive me, Grandee!” she cried, drawing her hand away. “I am definitely decided. I remember my heritage and I cannot even wish to do otherwise.”

“My dear Stephanie, the impulse to be weak cannot excuse itself by heredity,” Randall protested, rising and standing before her. “All the science of evolution is built upon a theory directly opposed to such an exception. We should never have kicked ourselves up out of the tadpole stage, if we had submitted to being eternally tadpoles because we came of tadpoles! We are men to-day simply because we went our ancestry one better, as you are going to prove. We have risen by an infinitely small series of progressions but always bettering the type. And because your father let himself go to his lower instinct is no shadow of a reason why you, born a free soul, should excuse yourself for admitting his propensities.”

“Science!” she mocked, “it is indeed far from my heart!”

“No it is not,” he opposed. “You are responsible to science as much as it is responsible for you!”

“The race is all the same to me,” she shrugged—

"I want my joy now. If others do, let them take it, or if they chose science or religion, let them take what they will!"

Randall thought of Euripides' cry:

twenty-four hours in every day, and seven of these in each week, for regret and mortal loneliness.

"And because you are a specialised form of individualism, you prove your own concern with immortality and potentiality!" he said in conclusion of his own idea. He was sure she was not hearing what he said, though she seemed to be listening to something, it might have been the whistle of a train from the crossing, but she gave no sign of interest externally.

"I am cursed. What does anything matter?" she said, coming back to herself with a start to realise he was waiting.

"My sweet, mistaken child!" Randall cried, laying his wasted hand again upon her soft, white one. "You share the curse of all of us poor mortal immortals. No more, no less! How an immortal shall house himself with dignity, or any semblance of grace, in a mortal form,—how the body shall subordinate itself to its demands upon the soul,—it is a helpless mystery. We must leave it to the secret intent of the Supreme Certainty. God knows what he intended the outcome to be, racial persistence or personal resurrection, but the

fact to respect is very elementary. Any child may understand it —"

"And this,—what is this fact,—which I do not understand in the least!"

"It is only this, that any one insignificant thing — Forgive me, Grandee!" she cried, drawing her hand away. "I am definitely decided. I remember and steers the type back toward the middle."

"Grandee, dearest, I am not of a seriousness, or of an importance," she pleaded, like a wistful child of a sudden. "I ask only, as the birds and flowers, my little hour of sunshine. I have not even those magnificent ideals for others that Raleigh has. I have never had any sweetness in my life until this present time."

"Do not make so trivial a programme for yourself!" he broke in. "You are a part of life's loveliness, Stephanie. One cannot see you without a thrill. You are made for our joy. Do not let the passion for one person begin and end here! I fancy in the pretty dream of Jacob, that the angels could not have come down to him if his ladder had not rested against heaven. We live by vision, tell me your vision for your life and I will help you realise it, as far as my powers permit!" He was stirred beyond all his usual reserve, for life without vision would to him be pillaged indeed.

"Tell me your vision!" he begged again, but she shook her head uncomprehendingly.

"A man's face"—she said slowly.

Steven Randall thought rapidly. "It is not strange that it has all happened as it has," he said sadly. He knew his world and hers too well to preach the beauty of the ideal to this wilful woman. Experience had taught him that there are twenty-four hours in every day, and seven of these in each week, for regret and mortal loneliness to fill. Life is too long to throw away happiness! He knew that cry. She had no need to teach it to him now.

"Stephanie," he said, lowering his voice to a thrilling whisper, "he is to be a priest perhaps, a great and distinguished mark in literature certainly. You would not wish to blight his career, to hurt the man you love?"

"Why not?" she challenged, her face hardening. "If I was able to do that, it would be just so much paid of the debt due his sex from mine!"

"Then you are selfish and wicked and no longer the Stephanie I love," he accused. "Love is always two-thirds sacrifice. Your pleasure is nothing beside his immortal value. You love yourself — not another."

"And I find the people banal, who so comfortably assign resignation and a career of blameless, empty sacrifice, for other people! Renunciation is charming in art and popular literature, but it is not for me, not until every path of happiness has been

proved false. I have no desire to be strong and solitary! I have told you I am a weak woman. I am not a great soul!"

Randall knew that sin is weakness oftener than deliberate strength. He tried to explain something of this to her now, but she repulsed him with a repetition of her first statement. "I am weak. My father ruined himself for love, my mother's name was Pleasure,—so my grandmother, the old Countess, always said. I have not that within me that cares to resist my heart. I love. I do not wish to resist. It is my fate,—that is all."

Randall saw the futility of appeal on general lines. How softly her furs covered her implacable resolve! He changed his tactics deliberately then, saying with all his affection for her visible on his face:

"But if you will not stay for right's sake, or for Raleigh's sake, or for the sake of the other you do love, will you stay for mine, Stephanie?" I am less strong this autumn, and I care for you very fondly, as your own father might have. Let me talk to you for a few minutes only as if you really belonged to me—"

A tear rolled across her cheek under her veil. "I want to do what I ought, Grandee. I was trained in obedience, but I have had no one here to guide me. I could carry any cross if Father Mayhew told me I must, or give up any pleasure if

a priest said, 'My child, you must; or must refrain.' It is the uncertainty about what I have to do now that is making me ill. Some days here God has seemed like a divine romance, I feel most affected toward him, as if he and love were the same. And some days he seems a superstition of the Orient, so droll as to make me feel like any *comédienne* to be thinking of it seriously, when I recall it afterward. I am afraid of death, but I am more afraid of this long life that I am sure will be always tormenting. Please let me go to Father Mayhew now. He will help me."

"My own vision of death has become so softened, dear," he remonstrated soothingly. "May it not be our dearest angel, longing to liberate us? How I wish I might help free you, and this whole scared world, from the terror of it! It does not seem as if we had been quite fairly treated about it, —and if you will stay with me, I shall feel it is a case of angels 'all the way,' like Browning's roses."

"I wish I were that angelic being you paint, Grandee, but —"

"Every woman has something of everything in her," he told her solemnly. "Let us be wise and talk together quietly. In America, men merge their love in its developing results —"

"Ah, yes! You have said it!" she agreed. "And in Europe love is an art, an occupation in

itself. One loves, hopes, despairs, regrets, until one is borne to the tomb!"

"Raleigh loves you as American men often love," he went on, disregarding her interlude, but she confronted him with:

"No, not even that! Remember, I know another type. Raleigh loves himself. If he deceived me with another woman, at least I should feel passion was yet alive in him. I could still wish to bring him to my feet. But how is a woman to be jealous of his career? A creature, formless, without flesh and blood, an idea without a body, a distraction without lips to kiss or arms to cling? How is a woman to care, if she is not jealous? And how is she to attack such a rival as this? If he loved a woman, I should be perhaps hot for a struggle, warmed into life by the challenge of her charm. But, bah! He leaves me for his stupid debates, his political strifes, his interest in public affairs of commerce and finance, his railroads and associations and always his meetings of pompous importance,—to him—always to him! The intrigues of diplomacy, when he had made a sufficiently brilliant name, he discards for the sordid power of money. He lacks in spirit, in imagination, 'finesse,' 'chic,' what you will! And flies to protect his precious health at the first distant hint of fatigue,—forgetful of all possible weariness in others, or in her who has the honour to bear his

name, as you have recently reminded me I still have."

Randall grew whiter, his nostrils thinned dangerously, denoting exhaustion.

"You cannot call him entirely given over to vulgar gain," he reproved. "Remember his poetry! Raleigh has the artist side and it is for you to find and strengthen it. Make him something you can be proud of, if his way of making you proud is a failure. Woman can make men do anything, good or bad. I should never have suspected Raleigh capable of the feeling his poems betrayed for you. What you have supposed was stolidity is his reserve. Men are not as a race apt at expressing their deepest feeling about any subject. Raleigh has given you a proof that surely none but a great poet ever gave a woman of her power over him. Of course I read his reason for withholding the author's name between the lines."

Her face did not change. She showed no sign of sympathy, no softening reassurance.

"Me, myself," she began, in her idiomatic way, "I was never pleased with his poems. They are hypocritical. He knows nothing of any of the emotions they describe."

Randall was taken off his guard. Could it be that she suspected them written to another woman? His first love perhaps? He hesitated, for an instant his own reason misgave him. Then he

steadied himself on Raleigh's good taste. He would never exploit an irregular affection. That was not Raleigh. Faithful to the very few who won him, he pursued through life this ideal of selfish honour, unscrupulously; utterly regardless of the rights of others, the wishes or resisting force of those with whom he dealt. Was Raleigh to come face to face with failure, which is almost certain to be the fate of one who judges others solely by their value to himself? The poems were spontaneous contradiction. She must be brought to see it.

"You do not for one instant conceive the poems as inspired by any other woman?" he demanded, brusquely, prepared to convince her.

"Not for one instant," she assured him, but he felt she was holding what she did mean very far back in her mind.

"Love for your husband aside, if you live to be as old as I,—" he began, but he saw her draw back involuntarily as if to ward off his fate, deny the desire for age. "If you live to look back over a long and varied life," he continued calmly, "you will only regret that you did not always do the right thing."

"But you have, poor, dear Grandee," she encouraged commiseratingly.

"No, not always, not nearly always," he admitted. "Not even always when I knew what was

right, or which was which. And once when I knew perfectly and chose the wrong."

To his amazement she threw herself on his breast with all the abandon that had made her as a child so unexpectedly adorable.

"Grandee, most dear Grandee! Then I will stay with you always, with you, not with Raleigh, as long as you want me!" she promised. "If you have done wrong perhaps love made you, and love will make clear to you how I feel, how I suffer. For surely the blessed À Kempis knows, and I know, that love is all that is of any importance, though other things for a time may be made to appear so! The awful loneliness will vanish. Oh, why did I never suspect that you too had sinned? Dear, marvellous Grandee, I might have known you were not in vain named for the holy martyr and saint. And if at any time Society has stoned you for your faith in love, or in some one too lovely to be quite faithful, or admirable in the dull virtues, it is Stephanie, who will understand and cherish you the more, and you will in turn comprehend how she may get free from her chains and be happy with her love, who is too young to be wholly sanctified to renunciation!"

Some one knocked and pushed the door deferentially open. It was Randall's personal manservant.

"Mr. Trent is in the drawing-room," he said

and withdrew, closing the door as noiselessly as he had opened it. Stephanie gave a broken cry of joy—"Let me go to him!"

They stood for a long pause, confronting each other and the situation.

Then Randall turned without a word and left the room.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

STEPHANIE sank down on the arm of Randall's lounging chair, overcome by a sudden extinction of being. Her limbs, betrayed by the wild beating of her heart, refused to support her. Mentally she was unable to distinguish one emotion from another. It was not fear that possessed her, yet it was a sweet form of terror. It was not passion, for it desired nothing, simply acquiesced. Nor was it desperation, for it was suffused with a sort of death rapture, a final wonder, that could never put her back in life as it was before, and might be the open door to a second existence beyond her present ordeal. Randall returning, read her as a soul at bay, between the hunter Duty, and the instincts whose prompting would carry her over the gulf of destruction.

She saw him drop a few drops of powerful restorative, without compunction, almost with envy, but weighed down as one in a heavy dream, powerless to interfere.

"Please wait here, a little while, Stephanie," he requested. "I will see Trent to-day by himself. It will be better."

He avoided sending her away, sparing her the momentary feeling of a culprit sentenced to her own room, and accepting for her sake the additional effort of this extra journey downstairs at an unwonted hour.

"Let me go to him!" had been her involuntary first cry, but she dared not repeat it now as she watched Steven Randall moving slowly away, for there was that on his face she had never seen before. She did not try to define it, being filled with the thought of Trent's nearness, but it was in reality the assertion of a principle of the established social order, in which he believed, and for which he would fight or suffer, or what is harder, allow,—nay, compel—those he loved to suffer.

She waited motionless until she heard the library door close behind him. Oh, if it was but herself, Stephanie, who stood there now! She knew the way to greet the returning wanderer. What did Grandee mean to do? Why had he inserted himself between them to-day, after weeks of indifference to their ill-concealed joy in each other? What would Trent feel toward her to find himself betrayed? What had she done! Oh, what had she done! Was it too late to say anything, do anything, that could restore the lost equilibrium of the mutual relations of the household? She leaned far over the balustrade, then ran softly

down one flight, to catch at the familiar thrill of the sight of his coat and stick lying in the hall below. The love of inanimate things intimate to a person who is dear, was hers. It is like nothing but the sting of a fallen jewel after the hand that wore it is wrenched from one's own by death. All her doubt of him, or of herself, was gone at sight of the rough great-coat that had sheltered him in storms uncounted. She idealised it until seraphic wings shielding Deity were not absurd to her overwrought comparison. It was intoxication to have him within actual touch again, if she chose to break Grandee's prohibition and go down to them, as if nothing had happened. She looked at the coat again for courage. And if the body is dear, why may not the outer garment be precious? Shall the soul say "I have no need of love's transfiguring smile to express me?" Does not Nature prefigure its Creator?

Trent was standing looking out upon the dreary winter landscape, when his quick ears told him it was not Stephanie's step approaching, so that his gladness at Grandee's welcome was untroubled by either immediate, or fear of ultimate disappointment. Grandee was always a joy. She would come soon. She never had any engagements. Perhaps they would have tea together in the Eyrie, though it was really later than the Sky High hour, and he might stay on to dinner and for the even-

ing. Everything was just as he had left it. The very inanimate backs of the beloved books glowed in remembrance of their happy hours together. He had been gone but two nights, yet it seemed a long time. He derided himself for being so inordinately glad to find nothing changed in his absence. Nothing could have changed or happened at Sky High in two nights and part of three days. The leisurely patrician quality of its atmosphere forbade such a suggestion. So the two men greeted each other warmly and made themselves comfortable over the log fire that never seemed to go out; the lighted shrine of the household. The absence of tea, or any mention of it, aroused a suspicion at last of something not quite natural in their pleasant intercourse resumed.

It seemed to have been forgotten by Grandee, in a lapse of hospitality caused by something absorbing enough to put it second for the moment,—which in itself hinted strangely.

“Mrs. Payne is not in?” Trent asked, as the long minutes passed and no allusion to her was forthcoming.

“Yes, I believe so,” Grandee replied, speaking of something else and making no motion toward summoning her.

“She is not ill?” Trent asked again, too nervous to veil his anxiety.

“No, I think she knows you are here. She was

with me in the Eyrie when the man announced your name."

The pause that followed implied that the servant had undoubtedly announced him to them both.

She had often kept him waiting. He tried to quiet his impatience by imagining what mood the gown she was even now putting on for him would imply. How much should he be expected to read in the colour? Would it denote a reserve or frankness of attitude toward him? It would perhaps be long, and graceful, and dark,—like twilight, the blessed Damozel incarnate,—or no, it would be radiant and soft and illumined like Fra Angelico robed in Paris,—or no, it would be Vienna rampant! Coquettish, "provocant," to suit dazzling glances shot at him beneath half-lowered lashes. He was young and in love and his dutiful chat with Grandee harassed him. He wanted to shut his eyes and hold his breath until he had again—oh, it was two nights and almost three days since he had seen her!

If Raleigh Payne carried his wife as a distant load-star on the horizon of his brilliant career and was satisfied,—Trent held her close in the depths of sub-consciousness, a part of himself not himself, as men more or less against their will admit the abiding presence of God. And Stephanie was the equal of neither, and to both she seemed all that she most was not perhaps. And how is truth in the

relation of a man and a woman ever to be established, since one unconsciously deceives the other by being other than he seems to her,—and the other by seeming other than she is to him? Steven Randall, intentionally procrastinating, gaining time, listening for his nephew, was evading an issue for the sake of the man before him. He knew that antagonism of sex was strongly developed in Trent. It had impressed Stephanie often, as if he resented his feeling for her, mocked at himself for it, hated her as much as he loved her, was ashamed of her power over him, then in sudden revulsion kissed his chains, subdued by that irresistible intoxication the variation of sex exerts over its chosen victims. The meeting of these two unusual male natures to-day, in conflict over a woman was something to be positively negated.

Randall realised that he need not hope for accident to deliver; nor event to take a hand in the adjustment of these three lives, to which he was bound by varying degrees of love and loyalty. Fate had looked the other way at the decisive moment. There were no gods to reach down from Olympus and magically protect or avenge. God had again chosen a man, through whom to work his will. There was no epoch-making catastrophe to avert the imminent suffering, no sudden death to relieve an over-crowded situation of two men clamouring for the love of one woman. There was

to be no intervening Providence. Steven Randall saw that a simple tragedy was nearing its culmination. That was all. The elements of raw sin and fainting righteousness were waiting to overwhelm their prey with inevitable consequence. There were no thunderbolts from heaven to descend. As naturally as luncheon had followed breakfast, and dinner would follow tea in the ordinary routine of their well-regulated lives, will and principle were to be the decisive factors in the tragedy developing before its single unwilling spectator. Training, religion, reason, enlisted against love, youth, and, on the woman's part, a rankling sense of injustice. Was it strange that the issue found him reluctant? And for the sake of each of them it was imperative he made no mistake.

"I came down to see you this afternoon, Lawrence," he said kindly, when it could be staved off no longer, "because I am expecting my nephew hourly." If he looked for any evidence of interest on the part of Trent he was to be disappointed.

"He is coming to surprise Mrs. Payne," he continued. Still no show of concern.

"Naturally she is bound to keep her afternoon free of other engagements," Randall explained easily. "He has been gone nearly three months, you know. It will be a time when husband and wife will forget us poor bachelors out in the cold."

"Will it?" Trent said. He asked seriously, for

information, not in a flippant manner of doubting its truth.

An awkward pause followed, during which they looked each other full in the face. Randall held out his hand,—“Frankly, man to man, you will understand my motive in coming down, instead of sending her to-day, won’t you? Without further words, I mean?” he requested kindly.

Trent’s eyes fixed as if measuring a mark at which he intended to fire. His pale face hardened to parian.

“Did Mrs. Payne know you were going to say this to me?” he asked.

“No.”

“Then if not,—” he broke off, as Randall reminded him with some hauteur:

“She is in my guardianship, you remember, beholden to the honour of my house.”

Trent winced. “I hope I did not deserve that rebuke, sir,” he said courteously.

“It was not a rebuke. It was a reminder only. You are bewildered, my dear Lawrence. Life has overtaken you at a vantage you cannot gainsay. I am trying to help you. Whatever transitory folly or mistake has occurred can be overtaken now. Later perhaps it might have been too late. Women are emotional, self-deception is inherent in them, they are undependable, and much of their charm would be gone if they were not. But a married

woman is a blind alley, or worse,— and I trust you will spare me further remark or suggestion. Raleigh, as I told you, comes to-night.”

“And what if he does? How does that change anything for her? What does it amount to more than it has in the past?” he demanded, surprising Randall by his counter-questioning.

“It amounts to this for you, that you have a family and a distinguished career before you, which you must not be allowed to mar at the outset.”

“I did not inquire about myself. It is too late to talk about laudable ambition to me, when it means at the cost of everything else most sacred in life!” he insisted bitterly.

“It amounts to this then, for her. Raleigh is after all her husband. She will go back to him, even if her heart has temporarily played truant in his absence. Their habits are familiar. She is his wife and he will assume control naturally and inevitably. The will-o'-the-wisp may be a pretty pastime, but certainty, to a woman of Mrs. Payne's type, is greater than romance in the last equation. She would have no fancy for second or third class foreign resorts, or a stately retreat behind remote ivy-wound palings of some lonely chateau in France,—Paris forgotten but not well-lost. My nephew has sacrificed her to his ambition, I grant you. He made her live in this country, isolated her from her practice of formal religion, subjected

her to every temptation that most easily besets a young and attractive woman. He is, however, her husband. He has his rights."

"He is a brute!" Trent stated baldly.

"No, he is a victim of the American form of the grand passion — Ambition. Stephanie will accept life on his terms in the end, and she will be satisfactorily compensated for all she has endured temporarily. He will place her beyond any position you could ever hope to give her. He has established himself in the world, and in her rational moments she perfectly estimates the importance of that world's esteem."

"The world you think she cares so much for, may turn down its thumbs when it hears that she has left him,—and why," he insinuated.

"Oh, my dear boy, how unworldly you are! The world goes with the man always. One knows in advance, as well as if it was already in one's ears, how the world will talk. 'Raleigh Payne? Why, he is the very prince of good fellows. There must be something the matter with a woman who could not appreciate him! He was mad enough about her to write poems about her in business hours!' And it will not hurt Raleigh a whit, but it will damn her. A woman's reputation is a mirror cracked after it is but breathed upon by suspicion. And men are a group of pots and kettles,—loath to call each other black."

"If she merely left him and went quietly abroad,—” he suggested tentatively.

"Then they will say less noisily but with a definite innuendo, 'What was it about her, any way? Was not she seen about a good deal up in the country with young Trent?' And it will not hurt you, Lawrence, but it will fasten a vague reproach upon Stephanie that will never lift again. If you really care for her there is nothing for you to do but leave her alone, now."

"She will not tell me this herself," Trent said calmly. "I might believe her if she did. I might not. But the fact is that she will not ask me to go."

"If she does not consent to all the conditions when I have made them clear to her, a formal separation can be arranged. But you know as well as I, that she would not be free to marry. I do not imagine that either she or you would contemplate any irregular relation. Whatever you may either of you have dreamed, she will remain with me. I have her word for it. I shall legally adopt her and eventually provide for her, under these conditions."

Trent caught only at the first admission.

"You have not talked with her then,—beyond her willingness to prove her affection for you personally? You are ignorant of her own real will or intention?"

He was fumbling at problems too big for him. His fingers trembled over knots Raleigh's firm hands would have snapped. Steven Randall saw that he was a boy in a man's worst predicament, tasking a man's mature force to the utmost. He saw that Trent shrank from the situation in spite of his manly front:—shrank, from motives of conscience revealed by daylight, though not inexorable as long as they remained blurred in a lover's twilight of the gods. While the woman who had swerved him from his control was in his arms, the darkness soft about them, he was all the lover and the man she dreamed him. But when the scathing reality of other men's eyes was turned dispassionately, critically upon him, the chill reactions of fact, duty, ideals still consecrated, sapped the glory of his desire and left him staring and incompetent. Steven Randall perfectly estimated his worldly embarrassment before the actual issue, and counted it as friendly to his own side of the struggle. He took a lighter tone now, in trying to bring the boy to reason without wounding his dignity.

"You are a scholar, Lawrence, bred to books. You are a victim of all the hallucinations ever suffered by all the poets over love and women. But you are lured hardest by the sirens of the First Edition! Stephanie has been, for a time, the embodiment of all that world of sentiment in which

you have lived alone until you met her. She is every one, in your fancy probably, from Helen of Troy down. That has been the great secret of your charm for her. The novelty of a new and absolutely unspoiled love to a Stephanie, gipsy-hearted, born even beneath a roving star, Rommany-haunted for life from birth, you cannot conceive."

Trent did not contradict the analysis. He remained silent and the older man knew that there was a harmless vein of unreality even in the very real suffering he was enduring now.

"How much of an idea have you, of what you are letting loose on us all by your ill-considered impulse toward another man's wife?" he asked suddenly, really wondering what Trent had hoped or dreamed.

"It is not a small thing to have won a woman's love. It overpowers everything for me and is enough in itself," Trent replied indifferently, as if it all ended there.

"Ah, you suppose it is in the winning!" exclaimed Randall. "But I tell you the great artist in life knows that it is the holding! Even if you hold her, the rare woman who can hold after she was won, hers is the kingdom of men! But without all the safeguards law and religion can put at her command, how rare, how almost unheard of is her triumphant vindication! And even if you did

succeed in making Stephanie happy, how long will she be to you what she is, without all that went to make her your ideal?"

"The value of anything is what it has cost you," Trent said tersely.

"Paid in soul is too costly. The soul is illegal tender —"

"But it puts a supreme rating on the transaction."

"You mean?"

"It compels one to be true to it. It cuts 'noblesse oblige' upon one's heart."

"You still believe in God, do you not?" Randall asked abruptly.

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Only that it is an odd way to begin to be true to a woman by being false to the ruling power of your life. I thought you had committed yourself to a life of consecration,—I even thought you had definite hope of the priesthood."

Trent would not argue. Something in Grandee's face cut him, and he cried out miserably, "Grandee, won't you understand? She is the only woman I have ever loved! I love her. I want her,—no matter about me. No matter about my future or her past. I am hers to do what she likes with, forever or for a day. Love is like this. You have your character, Raleigh Payne has his gratified ambition. I have my love of a woman, and may

God judge between us! The highest love gives its own life for its friend. She may have mine." To Grandee it echoed of the defeated Florentine Andrea.

"So — still they overcome
Because there's still Lucrezia,— as I choose!"

he quoted sadly, aside. "But remember, Lawrence," he warned "there is no value in useless sacrifice. Ask yourself who is to be helped by it, physically, morally, spiritually? Use your reason in religion, and above all things, do not be a fool for Christ's sake!"

To antagonise Trent was always to drive him to any desperate extreme. Randall trembled for the outcome if Raleigh arrived with Trent still in the house and in his present unreasoning mood. He refused to treat his outburst as final, however Trent might wish it so considered.

"I do not follow you, and I shall not allow you to throw away your life or career in which others are involved," he said with authority. "You seem to have forgotten that you told me how dependent your own family were upon you, in more ways than one. Recall the example to younger brothers, the dismay of those who are counting upon you to make their old age serene and proud. It will be worse than death, in many ways —"

"And you will be the murderer, if you put this

in her mind against me!" Trent declared. "She will never let me commit social suicide for her, if she realises it!"

"You talk foolishly," said Randall, looking at his watch, "and we have no time for heroics. There is an insurmountable barrier between you. You must give up all indulgence in such lawless fancies. Raleigh is due at any moment and you must go at once. He is not a man to trifle with, in affairs touching his honour or his heart. You must withdraw from the situation in a way that will not compromise Mrs. Payne. You must 'play the game,' and when that is done, I will do anything to make it up to you. Go to Europe, if you like, study, travel, collect, explore,—every resource of mine is at your disposal, and that is saying a good deal. Will you do what a man ought to, Lawrence? Of course you will! I never doubted it!"

Trent stood exactly as he had stood from the start, motionless as an inanimate thing. His pose reflected his moral attitude.

"Every man has his price, sir, I hope mine is above rubies," he said slowly, at last. "And if we did try to get along without each other and love, and did what you call 'play the game,' and compromise honesty to save reputation, which you seem to think the more valuable of the two,—the day would surely come when we could not. Our feeling for each other would overpower us. And

we should not sin deliberately or intentionally, but we should cease to care about anything, and cease to consider the struggle worth while,—and fall into each other's arms."

"Then, all the more you must go."

The door opened to its full width and Raleigh Payne stood before them.

Randall greeted him without surprise. He had been listening a full half hour for his coming, and counted on averting the impending collision. Trent stood with his arms folded. He bowed stiffly to the introduction informally extended, and Randall saw his efforts at complete conventionality threatened by this unyielding attitude from the start. Raleigh, who had never seen him before, and knew him only on hearsay, was entirely lacking in self-consciousness, effusively glad to reach Sky High, and cordially inclined toward all the world, until the singular detachment, almost accusation of Trent's bearing, impressed him as insupportable in a stranger. He dismissed it as due to some previous disagreement between the two other men, which he had unwittingly interrupted.

Under different circumstances his curiosity might have been aroused. The annoyance of an unfamiliar, and ungracious presence merely obtruded itself now, preventing any unconstrained interchange of news or question with his uncle. He much preferred a few hints as to the progress of

the intervening weeks, and Stephanie's mood of welcome for him, before he appeared before her in person. He had his own reason for taking her by surprise. His impatience increased as there seemed to be no hope of the stranger's departure. How singularly maladroit of his uncle it was, to detain any caller beyond the definitely declared hour of his own return!

Trent read his manner perfectly. He was gifted with that exquisite breeding, implying acute perception of the feeling of others. He was aware of his own lack of courtesy in remaining, but the small change of courtesy went to the winds under pressure of such exigence as he was now confronting. All he hoped or wanted, was to prevent this man from going to his wife, until he had declared his own hand. He divined how she dreaded her husband's return, though in words she had never betrayed her shrinking. If their meeting was inevitable, he meant it to take place with his own relation to them both definitely defined. He looked for a possible opening for what he waited to say, but in vain. After a little impersonal comment on the mildness of the season, the minor vicissitudes of the journey from town, a message from Christine and Newbold, no one was anxious to prolong the halting effort at triangular conversation.

Raleigh, frowning his dissatisfaction, turned to leave the room.

"You will find Stephanie in the Eyrie," Randall said. Raleigh nodded. Something in the mere assurance of his so taking everything for granted made Trent's temper rise as if he had been struck.

"May I have the opportunity for a few words with you, Mr. Payne, before I leave the house?" he asked civilly enough.

Raleigh glanced at Steven Randall for explanation, but Randall disowned responsibility.

"Did you mean with me?" he asked, "or with my uncle?"

"Yes, with you."

"With pleasure,—later perhaps," Raleigh replied indifferently, his hand on the door. "I shall be here several days. Look me up to-morrow some time."

He did not intend to be insolent or exasperating. The delay simply bored him. Trent's mouth hardened. "I prefer not to wait until to-morrow," he said. "What I have to say is very brief. It will detain you but a few moments."

"I took it your business was with my uncle. What can I do for you, Mr. Trent?" Raleigh put the question without a suspicion of the truth, and Trent, provoked to open rancour by Grandee's patronage of his love, and affronted by Raleigh Payne's easy assumption of Stephanie by marital right, declined all subterfuge or finesse, and did

the most unexpected and worst thing he could possibly have done. In his unworldly determination to prove himself a man equal to the mettle of those before him, he went straight at Raleigh with the gloves off.

"Mr .Payne," he began without preamble, "this is a hurried and brutal age. I love your wife. What are you willing to do about it?"

Diplomacy was never so confounded.

But Raleigh was one to dodge an issue with a light foot. It was his profession. He smiled amiably at Trent, as if thankful there was nothing serious in the air,—nothing of real moment at stake.

"I presume we shall not quarrel on a subject where our tastes are so identical," he declared without displeasure. And Grandee broke in desperately to divert Trent from the "*faux pas*" he seemed bent on making.

"Let my name there, as Abou Ben Adhem's, 'lead all the rest'!" he cried fondly.

But Trent undeterred went right on over the brink of disclosure, with the precision of a trained mind and clear head bent on self-destruction.

"She does not love you. Why keep up the farce any longer? And why keep her here against her will?" he asked.

Raleigh looked at his uncle for explanation, or perhaps confirmation of his own rationality. But

there was none awaiting him. Again diplomacy had been confounded by a direct question. The bare truth had shamed the draped statue that belied her holiness, and Trent's own theory of the value of truth reserved for great service only, most nobly vindicated.

"Well, I will be damned!" exclaimed Steven Randall and left the room, warned by the pain in his heart to delay no longer. He had just strength enough left to drag himself to the chair in the music room that commanded the stairway. He could at least prevent Stephanie's intrusion upon the scene he felt must ensue. Beyond that slight service he could do no more for her now. The pain was too sharp. Left alone together, the two men stood more curious to discover each other than to open the attack, or take advantage of the first blow.

"Let me explain," Trent began coldly.

"It might be as well," Raleigh said with an inclination of his head, giving him the right of a hearing.

"You do not know how to love a woman. It is not as if that lack in you was a sin. If it was, you could fall and repent and be absolved. A sin could be washed out, but your inherent passion for place and power can never be eradicated from your moral nature, because you treat it as a virtue. You consider what is really your worst weakness,

strength. You left this woman,—of all women! alone. You know what else you did, and did not do, far better than I. I can only guess. I am a man too. What else did you expect? Grandee has reflected it all in his letters of course. He is not blind. You did not care. You underestimated us both. You were so sure of yourself that you counted on doing as you liked with us when you were ready. You might have succeeded with a woman. But it is another proposition when you run up against a man. And a man with a will that matches your own. I do not care to prolong this discussion, or go into general principles. All I want to know is whether you will meet us half way, or if we must prepare to do what is necessary for our own happiness ourselves.”

Raleigh rang and ordered a cup of tea. He was minutely concerned as to the amount of sugar he measured out for himself, and coloured the cup he poured with a careful eye.

“As I have been from home some time, Mr. —Trent,” he suggested, “probably you will be good enough to defer this interview,—at least till I have seen Mrs. Payne.”

“She will not see you. She cannot.”

“A husband has certain rights, as perhaps you know.” There was iron under the suavity of Raleigh’s voice as he said it.

"And a woman has certain instincts," Trent inserted.

"I am going to have my tea now," Raleigh remarked, angry at last. "We will consider this rather impossible interview over, if you please. I shall ask my uncle to see that it is never re-opened or your visits continued, during our short stay beneath his roof. Good-afternoon."

Trent's dogged lips, thin and proud clenched to his purpose. He did not abate his insulting calm. He did not move.

"In questions of life and death a man does not stop to consider arbitrary trifles," he said, dismissing the facts of travel-stains and hunger superbly. "It is nothing to me when you have a cup of tea, or how long you have been gone. There is nothing of importance between us but the one vital issue. I tell you I love your wife."

Once more the diplomat in Raleigh triumphed. He resisted the temptation to strike, and smiled instead. "And my reply is, as before, of course you do! Why should we even pretend to quarrel about it?" Raleigh extended his hand as he spoke.

Trent flushed painfully under the ignominy of such treatment, the insufferable patronage of the action. Men feel the same who are refused honourable satisfaction. He turned sharply to leave the room as if to restrain himself from delivering

a physical blow. Something in the set of his shoulders suggested not retreat, but immediate attack in a new quarter. Raleigh thought rapidly. He had no wish to have Stephanie summoned to such an unbecoming complication. There was respect now, in the recall he offered, as he enquired,—“Have you considered to what your remarks lead? May I ask?”

“If I had not, Mr. Randall has at least pointed out their conclusion with a sufficient clearness.”

Again the diplomat played off and again Trent’s blunt resistance foiled the more skilful defence.

“I should like also to ask, since you force so crass an issue upon me, without delay, or I may even say decency,—what is your own proposition in all this vague statement and accusation of my married responsibilities? Let us presume for the moment that I allowed you to carry out your proposed invasion of my family life, where would you intend to live? How would you intend to support a woman? Mrs. Payne, unlike most foreign women, was married without a ‘dot.’ Had you been kept in ignorance of that sordid detail? Or have you sufficient means to support the extravagant necessities of an idle woman bred to luxury?”

The tea service stood untouched where the servant had placed it half an hour ago. Their voices rose and fell upon Grandee’s agonised ears for

what seemed an endless time. And not until Trent hit upon the secret spring of Father Mayhew did Raleigh Payne consider it all more serious than a theatrical tilt with tin weapons.

"You act as if you were talking to a criminal, as if I had forbidden religion and you were a knight to the rescue instead of a lover hot for seduction!" Raleigh threw at him, exasperated by his manner at last.

"The location of the crusades to-day is changed, the heart of chivalry is not dead." Trent, assured by his adversary's discomfiture was growing momentarily cooler. "Chivalry has no era," he added.

Raleigh saw his disadvantage and attempted to hide it.

"You are excited now. You do not know exactly what you are, or what anything else is. There is really nothing so new and distinctive about being made a fool of by a pretty woman, even if she is another man's wife. That is old too. Leave the priest out of it, since you are not her husband; but since religion is so sacred to you, turn your attention to the teaching of the church as to the seven deadly sins. Priests and husbands have never been appreciative of each other. That scandal also lacks in originality."

"I am ready to leave all out of it but the woman I love, and am bound to, by her own admission of

love for me. I only wanted to put myself clear before you at the start. I have done that. I will not detain you longer."

"You intend to leave it there?"

"I know what I intend. I have done what I could to make you see it in its right light. I can do no more for you."

Raleigh Payne recognised the mettle of the man at last. He let him get to the door before he asked roughly:

"Do you want to ruin yourself then for a woman who has belonged to two men before you? That is the question."

Trent stared at him. Raleigh came a few steps nearer, as if suddenly they were leagued together, as men, against all women in all the world since time began. "If I told you, that I of all men, have most cause to complain? If I told you that the woman who betrayed Nicholas Heathleagh, and sent him out of life from his disgust of all her kind,—the woman who had in his own last words, 'been everything to him,' was none other than the Austrian Countess Marie Louise Graubach von Lichtenberg? Whose husband I now have the honour to be?"

"You lie, he lied, you cannot prove it!" Trent's words dashed as consecutive defence.

"I am not lying and I do not think he was. Dying men do not as a rule. The game is played

out for them. As least as far as women go," said Raleigh soberly, without heat.

Trent was more crushed by the matter of fact statement than he could have been by any oratory. The fires of life, that a moment before had blazed up about his transfiguring Stephanie, and the sublime sacrifice she was ready to make for him, sank to black and grey.

"She loves me," he repeated obstinately as a child.

"And if she does say that she loves you to-day—" continued her husband, "what assurance have you that it will not to-morrow be some more brilliant man, or one of more brilliant prospects? What assurance is there ever in the love of a light woman, so called? The experience, sad as it is, will not perhaps hurt you in the world, after it has blown over, if you take her away from our protection now. But it will do things to your own nature, you will never wholly get over. For a man to have been briefly the transient lover of a beautiful woman, is not the same as for a woman to have been the mistress of a gifted man,—such as you undoubtedly are, Mr. Trent, on hearsay at least. In the end it will be slurred over in you, but it will ruin her of course. Those women go down with incredible swiftness. Men will say of me that I was patient, and she was a fool, or worse. I married her without dowry, an Austrian of the

aristocracy. You can be sure she was not flawless, or that would never have happened at Vienna, of all courts in Europe the most exclusive. If you would like to assure yourself of the truth of this statement, you can have the address of Mrs. Payne's grandmother, who signed the contract and permitted the *mésalliance*. For such it was to her and she was at no pains to conceal it."

Trent waived the notion aside as base. Raleigh went on swiftly:

"Leave her, and I will keep her pitiful secret as I have. But make me a target of scandal now, expose me to the tongues of my enemies ever so slightly just now, and I will reveal your dishonour and her secret that my silence has shielded, the pity of her shame. Her word, against mine, the word of a woman who has slipped once, and again betrayed her husband, will be given no credence in America."

Even as he spoke Trent felt the crumbling of his dearest certainties. It was preposterous, it was not subtle, it was not diplomacy. It was all that lies at the roots of a man,—his jealousy of another, that had goaded Raleigh Payne to such a pass.

"It is a lie," Trent reiterated, outwardly unshaken. "It is a lie and I will prove it. I swear to God I will!"

"I only wish to God you could!" Raleigh cov-

ered his eyes with his hands as he said it. The genuineness of his cry was undoubted. It was the outcome of long inward debate and tortured query. When he again lowered his hands and opened his eyes, the room was empty. Trent was gone.

CHAPTER XXII

AN ISSUE EVADED

HALF an hour later Stephanie stood alone before the Squirrel's Nest. She had followed Trent blindly. During all that hour of calm, while the tempest had swept over her, and the three men had disposed of her fate to their various liking, without consulting her, she had asked herself if it was really true?

If her grandmother's interfering manipulation of her life had been in vain, and if her feeling for Trent was imperative enough to compensate for the luxury and worldly consideration to be foregone for his sake? When a negative tempted her, simultaneously came its reaction, and as a sick person sinks back languidly upon supporting pillows her inclination sank back, and clung desperately to his image. It was a malady of reason, her love. It had taken pitiless possession of her. She could not, for she would not, fight it off. She had always recognised that a supreme passion would be her fatal enemy against reason struggling in opposition. To her there was no law, no goal beyond love. And there was no restraint she would impose between herself and its realisation. A daugh-

ter of the Greeks, believing her cult to be worship, glorying in her power to incite and bestow where other women, bent to modern standards, shrank back from lesser motives of shame or self-protection. There was no slight recollection of Trent's touch but set her vibrating like tense strings of an Amati, swept shuddering by a master hand. She was his by his control of her senses, however men might militate against the fact or its external conclusion. Since she was his,—the rest followed; to her it did not matter to what precise end. Trent was in himself the only conceivable end to her. They might talk to her of going away with Raleigh, paint the charm of new scenes, new faces in situations to breed new excitements,—but no! The poison was in her veins. It was too late for their mild antidotes of compromise. Not one of them could drive this delicious stupor from her will, or counteract the intoxication of his power over her. From his own lips she had drained the unnerving potion that was already working its spell upon brain and heart alike. If her soul questioned,—Trent's eyes answered, deep in hers. If its worth balanced for an instant waveringly against the wilful squandering of luxury and worldly esteem,—Trent's arms in imagination held her so close that the beating of his heart made her forget her own. Did she love him? Instantly his mouth, like flame upon her own, burned the answer

with the question. She had busied herself by putting on a long white gown. She associated it vaguely with marriage or a shroud. The ghastly alternative fitted her mood without too much of a shock. When Raleigh had come up to her there, she had permitted him to kiss her, perfunctorily, all the while trying to draw some conclusion from his manner as to the outcome of these long interviews in the library below. And he had been kind and hearty, and patted her between her shoulders as usual after a long absence, and after a few expressions of interest in her splendid appearance of health, and a few allusions to his own improvement, had excused himself to dress for dinner. He had promised her that he would not keep Grandee waiting, an allusion to his pet crochet, although he professed to have quite forgotten how to wear evening clothes in his savagery, up in the North Woods.

And the instant he had gone, she realised how cold she was, and catching up the long fur coat she had meant to wear to New York earlier in the afternoon,—or some afternoon long ago,—she had left the house and fled into the little strip of forest, without any definite plan or destination. She wanted to get away,—just not to have Raleigh touch her and make her turn so cold and sick again. That was all. The December moonlight made the frozen ground ugly, for there had not

been any snow that lasted under the trees, and the windy forest was alive with nervous shadows that flickered and startled her. She walked about idly, holding her long skirt in one gloveless hand, and with the other pushing back the branches that opposed her as she threaded the thicket beyond the half worn trail. She found herself before the empty house where the bachelors had so recently dreamed and feasted, appalled by its emptiness and significant desolation.

Her feet had brought her unfailingly, without guidance from her will. In her distraction, she had never considered the possibility of Trent's accepting her husband's dismissal, or treating it as coincident with her own, or Grandee's, or that of any one, or any train of refuting circumstances, until she herself bade him leave her.

She had reckoned only with her own love. She had staked her all on the vague hope of overtaking him here and he had failed her. How had Raleigh and Grandee done this thing? What lie had made him hold her less dear? What fear of the world insinuatingly presented had turned him craven? There flashed before her the hours that would drag their accustomed round and never bring him back. The pitiless spring mornings and balmy summer nights, and worst of all the afternoons of the first snow upon forest and garden,—when they had not cared! They two in the crimson library, with blaz-

ing logs and the solitude of friendly books and his favourite pipe for the last note of indoor intimacy. The first snow would be torment to her henceforth. Then suspicion caught her. Had he never meant more than a Platonic idling, perhaps? Had he but treated her to a private performance of some romance of chivalry,—read her a chapter from some unreal poem of idealism? He had no conception of a devastating passion perhaps. He too, was cold and calculating like all the rest of these emigrant Americans, struggling to rise in the social scale. He had amused himself in his own refined and peculiarly scholarly fashion, as unhesitatingly as any other man might have done on the lower levels. He had taken what he enjoyed while it was easily within reach, and then gone without the least effort to see her or indulge himself in so much as a last scene of recklessly impassioned parting. He had heard what Grandee had to say of worldly philosophy, let himself be persuaded and gone. If he had met Raleigh, it had probably been a mere form of pantomime between them. If he had so little spirit, it must have been easy indeed for Raleigh Payne to ignore, and brush aside in his grand manner, any hint of lurking issues beneath the surface, on which his own triumphant face was always reflected. Raleigh would never admit to himself even, that there could possibly exist an indiscretion in the attitude of his wife,—

much less toward a young scholar, unversed in glittering guile, who was put in his place once for all by a chance truism or two from his more worldly seniors. The train called long and shrill from the crossing. It pierced her by association. How easy to end it all there! She glanced down over her white dress. It would be torn and disgustingly stained when they found her. No, suicide was too one-sided. Life still held for her the suitable award for Raleigh, and scorn of the man she loved. These were left her. She still had "affairs" with existence. Oh, might life only be long enough to make Trent suffer as she was suffering now! She was glad she had fled on her first hot impulse. What if she had waited, boasted of her lover, confessing herself unfitted for life with a husband she could not love, imploring to be set free! Raleigh knew nothing yet. His name and fame were hers safely still. They were hers to use in inflicting what pain she chose upon the other man, who had abandoned her in her extremity of indecision. She would go home. She knew what her rôle was now. There would be no more vacillation with expediency. The pride of the old Countess was in her. Blood should tell!

At this moment the door of the perfectly dark house opened and Trent, bag in hand stepped out into the haggard moonlight. The world lay calm as if after the funeral of a great hope, a lovely

summer, or the passing of some dearest soul.

The reaction of his presence made Stephanie dizzy. She clung to the wall for support and stumbling forward, slipped by him into the hallway of the house. Trent stood staring at her as if a victim of hallucination. He made no sign of greeting, no motion of re-entering himself, any more than if she had been a supernatural manifestation. She supposed him transfixed with the audacity of her coming there, the wonder of her intention, or the unreality of her in her long white dinner gown, as she tore open her fur to give her cramped breast more air. Since he did not move she came closer to him, but still he made no sign. A moonbeam on his face revealed it hard beyond any face ever turned upon her. He was going to play the saint with her, then! So, she was to be shown that she was on suffrance here, at this hour, alone, a married woman. Bah! This was an exhibition of the vaunted honour of the great American man! It was a trifle late, since he had sinned, —if par example, love was a sin,—and his repentance on discovery impressed her as too Catholic to be convincing. She had so often captivated him to her caprice, was it likely a mere scruple, even a possible promise to Grandee, would enable him to resist her now? Now, when he was life and death to her? Now, when by his obstinacy he was rousing her as he had never done in his clear-

est devotion? There was no ambiguity in her decision now as she came so close to him her breath was sweet in his, and raised a beseeching face. He was iron before her, though he shut his eyes too hastily; shut her out with the temptation she presented his weakness.

With a cry she threw herself upon him,—and he stood, as a cliff before a breaker doomed to be cast back into the maelstrom from which it has lifted itself for the mighty effort of assault.

In an access of despairing bewilderment she lavished her kisses upon his hair, his eyes,—not his lips for he turned them from her with decision, if not repulsion. Then laying her ungloved hands shaking with the cold, upon his shoulders, she began her incoherent protestations, half in French, half in English.

“Listen only, my adored one. You have let all the others speak for Stephanie. But she has come to speak for herself. They have wounded you with their stupid fear of the world, and tempted you by the rewards that tempt egoistic natures like their own. They are two, and the woman they have disposed of to their content was one, and not permitted to be heard. But I tell you I love you! I am yours as you swore you were mine. Do what you like with me. I will never live with Raleigh Payne again. To live with one man for sake of another—that is a final blasphemy against the

Holy Spirit within me of which I am not capable. I am yours. *Je t'aime, je t'adore! Tu sais bien comme j'existe seulement pour toi!*"

Trent was a statue of marble stolidity before her. She gave a quick shrug of comprehension. He was saving her from herself, naturally.

"Once more, listen, my *Bien aimé*, these are on my part what they are pleased to promise me in exchange for a loveless life,—to me, Stephanie, who knows only how to love and was created for that end only. They offer me first,—respectability. To run the risk of being declassed in their disordered country, without a nobility or aristocracy, seems to them a calamity for an Austrian Countess! What can it mean to me? And after, they promise me dull, beautiful, weary days, a routine of glittering loneliness, eternal engagements distasteful to me, none of them gay or sweet. If this does not suffice, I am assured of a public part to play at your government's seat, and always a starving heart! No—let Raleigh Payne take his public to wife. I refuse that form of married infidelity. It is too bloodless. Compare it with the little, hidden, simple days of perfect happiness together." Her voice broke. She felt herself failing, sickened by all lack of response.

"You kill me,"—she whispered hoarsely. "Only for the love of anything you hold sacred do it completely. Do your work to the end! Finish

it, do not leave it to others whose hands are sacrilege!"

He had to hold her then, for she tottered helplessly, all against her will. Life seemed to have gone out in her pale body,—with hope. He drew her inside, and seated her upon the wooden settle beside the empty fireplace where only the witless moonbeams lit the melancholy ashes. Again she made one spent effort toward him, lifting her lips meek and passionate. But he saw them not. His was, he supposed, the madness that had driven that other man out of life before him. Her husband had said so. Her husband was a man of honour. Trent saw her now as she must have looked upon that first man's breast, their arms interlaced. He bade himself recall the embraces that shamed an honest memory to recall, that had ploughed their searing remembrance deep in the soul of that noble husband, who had kept silence until it became the price of another man's escape, and then been brave enough to speak and trust the issue to another man's discretion and just estimate of her worth. The thought turned him to steel. His desire for her was brutal as his rage with her for deceiving him was disdainful. If he took her now, he should lose respect for himself forever. If he let her undermine him now, knowing her unworthiness, it would be nothing less than to stamp their relation beyond hope of redemption. It

Holy Spirit within me of which I am not capable. I am yours. *Je t'aime, je t'adore! Tu sais bien comme j'existe seulement pour toi!*"

Trent was a statue of marble stolidity before her. She gave a quick shrug of comprehension. He was saving her from herself, naturally.

"Once more, listen, my *Bien aimé*, these are on my part what they are pleased to promise me in exchange for a loveless life,—to me, *Stephanie*, who knows only how to love and was created for that end only. They offer me first,—respectability. To run the risk of being declassed in their disordered country, without a nobility or aristocracy, seems to them a calamity for an Austrian Countess! What can it mean to me? And after, they promise me dull, beautiful, weary days, a routine of glittering loneliness, eternal engagements distasteful to me, none of them gay or sweet. If this does not suffice, I am assured of a public part to play at your government's seat, and always a starving heart! No—let *Raleigh Payne* take his public to wife. I refuse that form of married infidelity. It is too bloodless. Compare it with the little, hidden, simple days of perfect happiness together." Her voice broke. She felt herself failing, sickened by all lack of response.

"You kill me,"—she whispered hoarsely. "Only for the love of anything you hold sacred do it completely. Do your work to the end! Finish

it, do not leave it to others whose hands are sacrilege!"

He had to hold her then, for she tottered helplessly, all against her will. Life seemed to have gone out in her pale body,—with hope. He drew her inside, and seated her upon the wooden settle beside the empty fireplace where only the witless moonbeams lit the melancholy ashes. Again she made one spent effort toward him, lifting her lips meek and passionate. But he saw them not. His was, he supposed, the madness that had driven that other man out of life before him. Her husband had said so. Her husband was a man of honour. Trent saw her now as she must have looked upon that first man's breast, their arms interlaced. He bade himself recall the embraces that shamed an honest memory to recall, that had ploughed their searing remembrance deep in the soul of that noble husband, who had kept silence until it became the price of another man's escape, and then been brave enough to speak and trust the issue to another man's discretion and just estimate of her worth. The thought turned him to steel. His desire for her was brutal as his rage with her for deceiving him was disdainful. If he took her now, he should lose respect for himself forever. If he let her undermine him now, knowing her unworthiness, it would be nothing less than to stamp their relation beyond hope of redemption. It

would make her — what he could not name,— and himself an outcast from all his traditions. If he touched her now, it would be the same as the spring of the untamed beast for its prey. He should hurt her. He wanted to hurt her. He so hated her and so loved her! He held himself in check in sheer terror of himself, this new, unknown, strange self. Conflicting emotions, resolutions, longings laid a pall upon him, benumbing his confused desires. There was blood on her soul, if not on his hands. There was sin between them, or at least the foreshadowing of sin, in evil anticipation of each other. She had deceived each one of the three men who had adored her. He had her husband's word for it, the admission wrung from him to save her from further downfall. Trent swore that he hated her. Yet he was sure her touch would destroy both his hate and him. He was lost or saved by this half hour's work of endurance. The husband had sacrificed himself to save him. She was a creature of any man's love, lucky to find so magnanimous a shelter as Raleigh Payne. Then the moonlight through the unclosed door reached her, where she sat huddled in his contempt. Her head was thrown back as if to make breathing less irksome, her hands fell limply beside her with the soft palms open in their touching helplessness. The advancing moonbeam revealed her every perfection, offered her to him

without reserve, and he felt reason swerve from the spur of wild instinct. He looked at her, compelled by her beauty, transfigured by the passion he had roused.

What if he were to shut that door on the world? What if he lit a blaze at her feet, and took her to him forever? What was anything any more, but to feel the every curve of her unresisting body melting to his own! To let his clenched hands seek and find the joy they craved,—to give himself blindly to the innate something, for whose satisfaction man is made, in defiance of any super-artificial creed or code! A spasm shook him. Principle died hard. She was panting now, still speechless, but radiant with a smile that knew she and the lower impulse had won him against fearful odds of the spirit. Paler than the moonlight she smiled her unresisting smile at him. Whatever had snatched him from her, whatever unknown odds had been against her, she had prevailed. He was still hers. Hell and heaven were flinging wide their gates with equal plausibility. While Trent stood worsted, giving himself to her first in that distracted, ecstatic gaze, in the long moment that was to be the last before he snatched her to him forever, a shadow fell across the band of moonlight at her feet and her husband was upon the threshold.

With a glance that covered his wife and at the

same time exonerated Trent, he exclaimed with a sigh of relief:

"What a lucky chance that you were not gone, Mr. Trent! I have always feared Mrs. Payne would get a fright in these woods after dark. The labourers cross them because it cuts the distance, and it is late for a lady to be out alone at this season, even as early as this." Thus he ignored the situation and suppressed any explanation he might have dreaded for all their sakes. He went toward Stephanie as he spoke, and made a feint of drawing her cloak about her.

"I am afraid you were dreadfully startled, darling," he began. "Shall we ask Mr. Trent's housekeeper to give you a cup of tea, or a glass of wine? and then I will take you home." It was the perfect assumption of an unjostled self-assurance. He was assuming a housekeeper, to keep up the effect of outraged convention, and enunciating a rôle for each of them as smoothly as if it had been a proposition in geometry.

But Stephanie, triumphant in her freedom and reassured that Trent was hers, did not respond to the gallantry of her husband's effort to dictate his own terms. She had not risen. Indeed her manner betrayed no suggestion that she ever would leave her present refuge. She threw back the fur Raleigh had drawn about her, and her white dress in

the moonlight lifted her outlines in high relief against the murky shadows behind her.

"I have not been frightened," she said calmly. "I came here with intention. I followed my heart. It is the first time in my life,—it will not be the last, *grace à Dieu!*"

Trent made an involuntary intercepting gesture,—but Raleigh Payne seeing it, frustrated his purpose. "I entirely exculpate you, Mr. Trent," he said with unabated dignity. "I am sure your word was proof even against such a test as has been imposed upon you."

Stephanie's repulsion for her husband increased at each urbane word.

"I am in ignorance of whatever you have said or done to influence Mr. Trent," she said in an icy voice, haughtily lifting her eyes to scrutinise his unwelcome intrusion in the light of its possibility to harm her. "But whatever it may have been, it will have no effect. And for whatever you may say to me, it is too late, too much in the past."

Raleigh accepted the glove so rashly hurled in his face, as a definite challenge.

"Not an hour ago, Mr. Trent left me in entire agreement with my suggestions. No woman would wish to detain a man against his will. When there are others dependent upon him and his honour demands it, there is no second choice, even in love. Caprice in a pretty woman is not

unpardonable, but when it goes so far as to threaten the ruin of a man's career, my dear Stephanie, no honest man will stand by and see the waste of a life scattered to the winds of momentary pleasure,—or passion if you like to call it so. You are both very young. I am not going to play the Moor and rant in serious horror at your thoughtlessness of conventions, or even of myself. Fortunately Mr. Trent has no wife to make an outcry. It lies interred in our three capacities for forgetting. If you are sufficiently yourself again, let me assist you in putting on your coat. We shall have kept Grandee waiting for dinner as it is, and as you know, Grandee detests waiting."

"I am not going," she said.

"That comes better from a lover than from the woman in his power," Raleigh remarked, with a sneer he made an effort to soften without lessening its full value of insult.

"Possibly,—to a man of your scrupulous honour." Her voice out-sneered him.

"To any man protecting a woman of so stainless a record as your own," he replied.

Stephanie's heart stopped beating. It seemed to turn and go the other way, then stand still and crumble, like water slowly dropping.

His insinuation was perfectly clear to her. He knew then. In her later complexities she had

grown dull to that sharp, earlier torment of uncertainty. The climacteric moment was upon her. It was to be a test of her word believed against his own. To lose her head now meant to lose everything, past, future, present, while Trent stood waiting for her to rid herself of this encumbering figure that had stepped between them and hindered their desperate fulfilment of themselves. In her soul she whispered, "O Sainte Vierge! Aide moi! Ne m'abandonne pas!"

The two men, jealous to the quick, each of the other, and mated in mutual jealousy of the dead man they believed to have loved her first,—thereby defrauding them, helping her to deceive them of their male right to be first in the heart of any woman they might choose,—stood waiting before her. Something in her, as she rose and stood frail and undaunted before them, in her angelic whiteness, disarmed Trent. If any one but Raleigh Payne had told him so base a truth about her, he would have staked his life on her perfect goodness and innocence of soul. He saw her flinch at her husband's retort. Was it weakness or astonishment at an attack so unprovoked, so portentous in its double meaning? How was he to tell? He stood helpless between these two, who were bound together in marriage, in knowledge of each other, in suspicion and in hate. It was as if he looked on at a storm sweeping round him, dealing

devastation he was powerless to prevent or escape. Then for the first time Trent spoke.

"I told your husband this afternoon that I loved you," he said, turning to her only, speaking as if they two were alone.

"And he was able to convince you that you did not?" she asked.

"No, I have not changed. I do — I shall —" he confessed, wretched at his vision of coming days deprived of her.

"I was, however, able to convince Mr. Trent, that a man's honour is more to him than a woman's temporary preference," Raleigh explained, with cutting emphasis.

"If you intend to assume that my feeling for him is the less sincere, because of my present position as your wife, let me remind you, Raleigh Payne, that the professions of love between us have been yours and not mine," she said with hauteur, unsubdued by his covert threat. "I do not say that you could not have made me love you. It remains only that you did not make the effort, or the sacrifice, as you wish to call it. A woman's heart cannot be filled by a public appreciation. I am not light in turning from you to another man, who is capable of love, who does not measure, and considers it of first importance in his life. You know perfectly what our relation has been, and who has been most at fault. I make no accusa-

tion or defence. You know that none is necessary between us."

"I make no allusion to our own mistakes," Raleigh said hastily, "rather to the more removed past, which never escapes a woman's relentless memory. We both remember our own perhaps too well to boast. But do you consider yours calculated to make it a safe venture for a man of Mr. Trent's rare promise, to throw reputation and character away for your sake? A woman who has loved more than once, loves again, most often, does she not."

If she had turned upon her husband then, demanded what he meant, accused him of a cowardly insinuation that he could not support, Trent could have believed her utterly. The fact that she did not, accused her in his painfully confused estimate.

"You know best what you mean, if you mean anything," she said. It sounded evasive to Trent.

"Do I?" Raleigh questioned. And it had the ring of sincerity she lacked.

"You also know that you are lying, by what you imply," she asserted, gathering courage from desperation.

"Have I ever lied? When? In public or in private life? Could my worst political enemies find anything to discredit my word? Have even the Catholics found one flaw in my honour?

Should I have been spared if it was possible to assail me?" he flung back at her arrogantly. "With what untruth do you presume to charge me, Stephanie? A wife should know her husband's honour at its weakest point!"

He had wisely or unwisely given her her opportunity, once for all. He was waiting. If she spoke now, he knew how to silence her forever, disgrace her in Trent's eyes and tighten the chains that bound her to his will. Her lover's whole hope and faith were in the balance,—lit his imploring gaze. He loved her whatever she did or said, but he besought mutely of heaven, that she prove herself beyond reproach for her own sake.

She had drawn herself up before them, a proud, slight figure of contempt. The withdrawal of her posture, the poise of her deliberation discarded them both. Austria more than religion upheld her in this ordeal before the two men who had already judged her and held her condemned.

She knew how well it lay in her power to impeach her husband's vaunted honour. She had only to produce poor Nicolai Heathleagh's blotted poems. Probably she had but to hint at the defence in her hands, to hush Raleigh's calumny of her forever. If he knew, he had probably told Trent all and more. But did he know or was he but letting his suspicion be confirmed or put to sleep once for all? Both Trent and he, being men,

would believe from Nicolai's vague words what Raleigh had distorted from them. He would make Trent believe the worst of her if she produced these very poems to support her counter-charge, whose passion would contradict her innocent denials and shatter the faith of the man she would die to save from such desolation. Did men ever believe a woman in affairs of the heart? Never! If she insisted on her innocent relation with the dead man and taxed Raleigh outright with theft of his verses, it would only complicate her further, instead of extricating her clear and blameless in the eyes of her lover. Trent would despise her, Raleigh would hate her. Heathleagh must have told Raleigh that no one had ever seen the poems but the one woman. If she proved herself to be that woman, how could she escape their inevitable conclusion? If she said nothing, there was the chance that Raleigh knew nothing,—beyond some vaguely aroused suspicion, and that Trent would fail to catch the deadly import of the issue. If she could save his ideal of her, or the chance of his faith outliving a false accusation, it was infinitely better than taking the open alternative. Father Mayhew could do the rest later.

It was this blending of possibilities that impelled her restraint at last.

“My conscience and my memory are reconciled,” she said coldly. “I am ignorant of your intention

CHAPTER XXIII

THE TEST OF MONEY

WITH an outward composure that covered something very like paralysis of inward being the habits of Sky High were resumed. Grandee asked nothing and did all that lay in his power to preserve a semblance of family accord and winter cheer. Never had the great log fires leapt more brilliantly or the devices of the table held more subtle snares for the appetite. He talked wisely and wittily, of books, of his own experience with foreign rulers, and the men and women of society. He was never, it seemed, at loss for an illustration, the "mot juste," a word picture of some famous personage who had at some time been his own familiar friend; or the intimate interpretation of the moods of Nature,—and his speculations toward the future of the race, and one's own premonition of immortal adventures yet to come, disembodied of this hindering bulk and free to gad with the stars if one would.

He knew that Stephanie's capacity for suffering was that of a sweet, undisciplined child, taught only in the convent and the hearsay of her grandmother's world. Neither of these he believed ade-

quate to the great moral strains of maturity. They would break down before a vital decision, Grandee was sure. He would have supplied a firmer foundation for her if he had known how. As it was, he held her hand in his as closely as he could and trusted the rest to the ministration of time. She had none of Christine's resources at her command. She had read, played, dreamed, dressed, even ordered Grandee's household to a certain extent, for Trent. Without him there was no meaning to any single one of the activities of her day. Her tastes were intrinsically pointless unless intensified by his sharing, and nothing was worth while without his dazzled appreciation.

What eloquence had either Grandee or Raleigh to restore the thrill she pined for? Neither had been able to make her waver in her own devotion to Trent, but when he left her, or allowed her to leave him, and go alone in the deathly moonlight from the Squirrel's Nest, every hope had collapsed and buried her under an ignominy that shamed even her fondest memories of their brief passion for each other.

Until this calamity Grandee talked against time and an unlistening heart. After that tragic desertion of hope, no one dared to break in upon her rigid reserve. She did not regret her silence under her husband's provocation. She did not feel any sort of emotion about anything. She went

on living, and Grandee grew more grave as Raleigh procrastinated his preparations to take her away from the scene of so much unhappiness.

To Raleigh's generous proposal, "Suppose we begin all over, darling, to-day,—and try to forget there was any yesterday," she had only repeated uncomprehendingly, "Begin what over?"

"Begin everything over."

"You wish to leave all that is in the past, as if it had not been?"

"Yes," he assured her, encouraged by her attention. "I mean to step out of our past selves, leave our unpleasant memories behind, our sins toward each other, our inheritance of weakness, our tendencies, habits, associations. Think what it would be! A sort of Easter of the heart!"

She shook her head unconvinced by the alluring possibility.

"I am willing and ready, darling. Don't be hard on yourself!" he urged with increasing magnanimity.

"To begin over?" she said again. "Ah, no! That would be to lose all and to gain,—what?"

In her soul she was sure he suspected her to have been guilty in her relation to Nicolai Heathleagh. She considered him a coward to withhold his charge for fear of her own unique hold over him in return. Why should he assume this forgiving condescension? He, who had stolen a dead

man's reputation and a woman's right to denounce him? In the rage of helplessness she turned to Father Mayhew for light. She would have gone to him, begged him to provide her with some form of escape, but she knew too well that the convent would be his only alternative from a life of discretion with her husband. And the convent would separate her from the thought of Trent. She needed no external aid to her vision of him, any more than the hasheesh dreamer needs to glorify his cell; but if to love him now, in her wedded vows to Raleigh Payne, was a venial sin,—to adore him behind a nun's vows to heaven would mean not purgatory shared, but ultimate perdition, alone. The advantage was all Raleigh's. It maddened her most to be dependent upon him. Day and night the struggle went on within her, while Raleigh delayed at Sky High, which puzzled Grandee and worried him even more. He would have given a great deal for Dan Wylin's verdict now: would have sent for him, if he had not gone South to supervise the opening of a home for nervous children, founded at his own expense and as his own experiment. It occurred to him as possible that the added weight and superb animal condition visible in his nephew might conceal a mental weakness, hid from all but the scrutiny of professional insight. He did not like to hurry Raleigh back to the city, lest his imagination get working to the

detriment of his own condition. Otherwise there were other good men who could take a look at him, and suggest a beneficial move. Grandee was sure the quiet of Sky High had no charm for Raleigh, yet there was no effort toward other departure and a lack of initiative never visible in that indomitable will before.

"What does love mean to you, Raleigh?" he asked, one afternoon as they sat alone in the Eyrie, pretending to read. The answer was unhesitating and sure.

"What does love mean to me? Life,—doubled."

And Grandee knew that had he asked Trent the same question, the shadows of Rossetti would have clung to his evasions, reluctant and dusky. And to which of these men, each the counterpart of the other, was it real? Or even more real? To which, if either, was this dear woman necessary? And if to either, why did they not assert it? Steven Randall condemned both men, in his heart, these long, dark afternoons of early winter when the cold crept like a were-wolf nearer and nearer the blaze upon the hearth. What business had the Creator to have made women, if they were to be the legitimate victims of men? Raleigh read his unrest and met it encouragingly.

"I wish you would not worry so about Stephanie, Uncle Randall," he said kindly. "She will

come out all right. Let her have a little chance to get over the jolt of the first re-adjustment. As soon as she gets herself in hand, I shall assert myself of course. She will swing back into step easily enough. We shall get on famously,—better than ever for the additional knowledge of each other. I am not taking this flurry seriously. I do not see why you should. There is no harm done. Stephanie will pout for a week or so, and then forget it all."

"You seem to eliminate the effect upon Lawrence Trent," Randall said drily. "I suppose you recognise what this has taken out of him."

"As for him, he is at large again all the better for a harmless course in feminine folly. He is an ambitious lad along his own lines. He would not want Stephanie or any other woman at the price of his standing among men. He has a keen head on his shoulders, once a woman's arms are removed from them. He has more stuff in him naturally than Jim. It takes Christine to keep Jim up to the scratch, but this younger brother is marked for the peerage of his profession. He knows it. He will be more careful of entangling alliances in future, to speak diplomatically."

"I am not sure you are right," said Randall slowly. "I think you do not read him deeply enough. He is one of those still things, narrow as the grave and just as final."

"On the other hand, Stephanie herself would never espouse a cottage by the mill!"

"I do not know about that either," Randall objected again. "She is disillusioned pretty thoroughly for a woman so young, and he is a scholar. She has seen, and heard said to her, about everything men and countries can give or say. She knows the worth or vanity of it all rather too precisely to make any mistake in her estimates. He cares not a jot for anything outside his books,—unless it is Stephanie. Politics mean nothing to him. I doubt if he knows whether the Governor of his native state is a Democrat or a Republican. She will always be able to remember, for her amusement,—and he can imagine,—and then, they are both under the spell of each other."

"It surprises me to hear you treat it as more than a summer breeze," Raleigh said carelessly. "I am always curious about what you think, but I own I am astonished that you think at all about so transient an episode."

"I do think about it. I think even more,—and that is, if either of them had a private fortune we should be given a chance to see where we came in. I believe it would astonish you even more."

"The lack of sufficient fortune Mr. Trent does seem to consider a final barrier. There is nothing that cools a lover's ardour quite so perceptibly as the need of the almighty dollar, vulgar as it sounds

in association with the divine language of the inflammable poets," Raleigh said, smiling at the comedy element in all heroics.

"Of course he cannot contemplate reducing a woman like Stephanie to even poetic, rose-thatched poverty," Randall mused sadly, "but his motives are not mercenary."

"You seem to be commiserating their escape from wrong-doing," Raleigh remarked, annoyed.

"I pity them," Randall replied simply. "If I had been Trent I could not have done as he has done, whether from supernatural strength or human weakness."

"And I think you quite underestimate the power of public opinion and social convention. My wife will never over-step the bounds," he spoke stiffly. Randall made no reply. He was thinking how he would love to put a fortune at Stephanie's command, if only sin would not be the price of her ensuing happiness. It seemed harder than ever to him to-day, that love might not flow in a refreshing stream, to gladden meadows and illusion cities. Why should love be expected to stay always in one place, more than a life-giving river on its glad way to useful mill-wheels and majestically stored power, as well as the lush banks of flower-fringed idling?

"One's vision of life is a fairer habitation to dwell in, than the actual world," was all he said

aloud. But Raleigh instantly took high moral issue with such laxity. "Vision is the catch-word of to-day, Uncle Randall, not duty. I heard a Bishop say, at a dinner in town the other night, that the children of Israel were lost because they did as seemed good to them, and God was not pleased!"

"Don't lug God into this. I cannot stand that!" Randall said impatiently. And the subject was never re-opened.

When Randall appealed to Stephanie to rouse herself and try to let the light in her heart again, she cried out, as a sick child, "I want to, dear Grandee, for your sake. But I am not able."

"You are dear to me as a daughter," he told her, "be brave, and let me give you all I have, to fortify your self-respect and nerve you to face life again!"

"And I love you, too, more than all,—but one," she assured him, "but I have lost my power to love, or to wish anything very strongly. For me the summer is over. It is winter in my soul also."

Gradually a dull semblance of harmony crept over them. She could not marry Trent, for while Raleigh lived he would not marry her, even if she swore she was a base creature and obliged Raleigh to divorce her. And even if law was appeased to the last fraction of blood, she could not ruin Trent by giving herself to him penniless. Others depended upon him. Only once Randall

dared to approve and encourage, but then she turned from his smile with a hard shrug that hurt him, as she cried, "Do not deceive yourself. I am dependent upon my husband. We are obliged to live it out with a crossed sword between us. Love is my sacred ideal. Ambition is Raleigh's idol." There was no hint of resignation in her word or manner.

And Raleigh went smilingly on, unconscious of her smouldering resentment, indifferent to all save his own health and success, and so certain of his power over her that he was willing to wait indefinitely. If he had not been a trifle suspicious always of too much good luck, he would have been perfectly at ease.

The Trust investigations had proved a dumb show. He had come off with flying colours and an added notoriety, involving complimentary resolutions, and flattering notices right and left. He had come out ahead in his struggles against certain Catholic interests that he had checked from predominance in a vital quarter, and though assailed on all sides, his unblemished reputation for truth had protected him from the probing given all public men under the glare of a crisis. Wall Street was firm and he had received an offer for his risky timberland in the North-west that convinced him it would be a mistake to consider its sale, thereby backing his first scent for the investment, which

pleased his appreciation of his own judgment. And now the Washington appointment was open, and soon to be decided, with no conspicuous rival in sight. His complacency was only marred by his certainty that life always strikes an average. And if all else was going so swimmingly, the drop might come in the very place he would give up all the rest to secure. He did not lay enough stress on this whirligig in his wife's emotions to consider it useful in the balance of greater things. Beside he had a secret to tell her, that was only waiting for a less indifferent mood on her part. He could absolutely count on her pleasure in the telling, and he was reserving it for the last course in his cure of her experiment in the illegitimate comedy of European marriage *à la mode*, including the lover as an inevitable third.

He did not suspect that every hour Stephanie hated her bondage more. What he had said to Trent, she had no way of guessing. She supposed it was nothing more than the trite maxims of the world. He would not dare to accuse her. He had not dared before her face, and no man would be a man who refused a woman opportunity to contradict a lie. He had spared himself as much as her in holding back the name of Heathleagh, deterred perhaps by the same scruple that sealed her own lips. Her mind ran incessantly on the poems. Were they, after all, so compromising? It was

a brilliant winter morning when the idea came to her to read them over, just as he had first written them, and see if they were indeed beyond her use as complete justification, and reason for leaving the husband she knew false at the core. Outside, the white-cowled pines bowed submissively to their heavy habits of snow, and the shadows along the edge of the forest lay purple as the vestments for the especial feast days of the church. She went to the foreign dress-box that always stood in her own room, at home or hotel, and unlocking the box that held her private papers, drew out the battered sheets and began to read.

They transported her. They suffocated her—she threw open the window and the cold clean breath of the pines blew across her with infinite invigoration. The wind was blowing in a determined way, sweeping down from the height to the valley below, in eddies that set the snow whirling before it.

When Raleigh later opened the door from the next room, the draught sent a gale blowing, in which the light curtains streamed out like banners, and put every flimsy thing in instant motion. The papers before Stephanie would have gone sliding after, if she had not swept them hastily into an open drawer,—glad for this excuse of necessity to save them from being blown out of the window, which he closed; commenting disparagingly on the low

temperature of the room. She saw at once that he had an object in coming to her there and something of importance to say.

"You have seemed so preoccupied, darling," he began, seating himself upon the arm of her chair, and pushing in one of her long shell hairpins with a marital air of entire possession, "that I have delayed giving you some information that has come from abroad. I waited to investigate it first, and then to have the announcement confirmed."

She paid little or no attention to him now, because it sounded so exactly like all Raleigh's previous announcements of a new appointment. She was unprepared to hear him ask, instead of continuing with his monolog,—“But first tell me, when did you hear last from your grandmother?”

Stephanie shrugged regretfully. She shrank from admission of her Grandmother's casting her off. It wounded her to have it recalled. “She does not write at all. She has forgotten me,” she said.

“She has gone so far as to make you believe her indifferent as to your fate?” Was he trying to impress the misery of her utter dependence upon her? Her heart hardened under the impression that he was.

“When have you heard from her?” he persisted.

“Never, since she gave me over into your hands,” she replied dispassionately.

They had all done what they liked with her from the first! She felt herself a mere object in their handling.

"I have intended to live up to her confidence in me," Raleigh said hastily. Was he reminding her that she, not he, had departed from the letter of their contract?

"Why do you ask me questions about my grandmother?" she asked, wishing he would go away. "What possible interest can our relation have for you?"

"It has a very great interest; for you have misjudged her affection, even more than mine." Still she betrayed only a sense of interruption.

"The old Countess is dead," Raleigh added, "and she has left her entire estate to you, darling." Even then Stephanie looked at him with unconcern.

"You see she did care for you, appearances to the contrary, all the time." He patted her arm playfully as he watched her for the revival of pleasure he had anticipated from the telling of his great news.

"The Countesse de Lamoureux died in spite of herself, or her own wishes," she said unmoved. "As her only surviving descendant I must inherit. That is what has arrived, tout simplement. It is not an affair of sentiment," she corrected him drily.

"Don't be so hard toward her, darling! She had suffered greatly, you know, and the real estate in

Vienna will come to you unencumbered, with a sufficient fund to make up to you for your father's failure to provide for you."

"We will leave the misfortunes of my father out of our discussion, if you please." Raleigh thought he had never seen such an exhibition of hardness of spirit, such unrelenting implacability toward the dead.

Suddenly she covered her face with her hands, and sat so long silent that he believed her touched, at last, by natural feeling for the loss of the only earthly relation of her own blood. Instantly he laid a warm hand on her shoulder, won to her by an instinctive sympathy, urging affectionately,—

"Do not grieve too much, Stephanie. It was a natural and inevitable death. She was very old,—beyond almost every enjoyment, and she had lived her life out. Let us try to feel she had time to fully repent her follies, and face her future in a hope of immortality."

But Stephanie was not weeping. When she slipped from his caress, it was a tearless face that confronted him.

"When did you know this?" she demanded.

"Only recently by the lawyer's communication."

"Why did you not tell me immediately?"

"I waited to establish identity, according to foreign custom. I had to assure myself there had been no mistake and no legal form was lacking."

"Did you know it the day you came up from the city and found Mr. Trent here with Grandee?"

"I was reasonably sure of it."

"Why did you not tell me?"

"I considered you too over-wrought at that time to pay proper heed to any other matter, especially one that might prove an uncertainty."

"I see," she said, and her voice shook so that she could hardly form the words. "And so instead of telling me then, you generously took me back, after that interview with Mr. Trent, as the forgiven, and sinning wife! Penniless, friendless, except for her husband's merciful bounty?"

"I fail to catch the connection, if there is one in your own mind, Stephanie."

"There is one! My word of honour for it!" she cried, laughing hysterically, "there is as much connection as freedom to the captive after he has taken poison." She put her hands over her mouth to prevent the hysterical desire to laugh more loudly, even to scream.

The aristocratically marked brows across Raleigh's nose contracted haughtily.

"There was no dishonour in delay, or in my intention," he said.

"Oh Raleigh, your honour! You are more than honest in so many ways! One could leave the golden rule lying about forever, with entire safety, — you would never touch it! You knew of this

money my grandmother had left me, but it was too critical, too dubious, a moment to admit it, yes?"

"Stephanie really, you are insulting!" he protested, his colour deepening as she went on.

"I am not insulting. I am only honest like you. Does it please you? You knew I could not leave you without a sou. You know I should have gone to Father Mayhew if I had seen but a little fortune in my own right. I would have gone to the man I loved, if I could have been anything but a bitter embarrassment and a burden to him. And you conceal the fact of my fortune from me, and go on talking to me of honour! It is too ridiculous! Mon Dieu, but how you make me laugh! How you are droll!"

Her ridicule stung him beyond any possible reproach. At the moment some one knocked. Stephanie remained motionless. It was Raleigh who recovered himself enough to step to the door and open it.

Joel Underwood stood outside. He stepped into the room, unbidden, holding a paper in his hand.

"It blew out of your window," he explained, "right down into the early snowball bed. I was lightening up their covering a little. Season's too warm for all the bulbs. It is going to be the poorest year since I was a boy, for all those early things.

I should not wonder if they was to fail and not one of 'em come to a bud."

"I hope not. We should miss them sorely from the terrace. They have our best and brightest wishes!" Raleigh returned glibly.

"When I see beggars ride I shall value wishes more than I do now," Joel observed, glancing at Stephanie, who threw him a faint smile. He extended the sheet of paper that he had rescued to her, with unconciliated visage. As he withdrew, the eyes of the husband and wife met upon the manuscript poem of Nicolei Heathleagh—

"L'Hirondelle Blanche"

For some time they stood so. Neither knew how long.

"So you were the mistress of that dead boy!" Raleigh muttered, too shaken to spare her.

"I was not."

"This proves it!"

"You forget perhaps what it also proves?"

Again they faced each other. Each was mentally reviewing the past and the influence exerted by a mutual enmity.

"I will tell you without reserve, once for all, that I loved Nicolai—" she said dreamily,—“so loyal, so brave, so tender always of a woman's heart! Never cruel, never forgetful, never degrading love to a second place! His devotion was

like that of a mother to her little child. Gentle, patient, trusting wholly to the generosity of the heart that loved him. Faithful, in face of the appearance of infidelity, he held the young girl he adored sacred as heaven. Courageous in danger, but before her trembling with awe. First at the front in battle, but weak enough to weep over her slightest sorrow or pain. Deceived, it is true, but never by Stephanie! He remains in her disillusioned experience of men and their world, the purest, noblest, most generous figure of a young girl's blameless dream, before the rude dawning of her day of marriage and reality."

Twice Raleigh began to speak. Twice she motioned him to silence.

"What is there more to say?" she demanded. "We do not believe each other. You have played your part in the play to the end, for as far as I am concerned it is the end, here and now. I have always said you were a man of the very highest principles, *for others*. My ideals are of a difference. My grandmother the Comtesse de Lamoureux has atoned, blessed be her memory! It is now possible for us to consider it of no moment what one does, or the other feels. There is no necessity of discussion or explanation or recrimination between us. I shall go at once to Vienna to assume control of my grandmother's affairs. I shall do all my possible to induce Grandee to accompany me."

"You will leave me, Stephanie?" He was incredulous.

"With your career," she replied sweetly. "It will not fail you. You possess the first quality of success — ingratitude."

"And my love for you cast aside?"

"You have loved my contribution to your success, and you have had it. You will always have my good wishes."

"And the scandal!" he retorted.

"Not unless you prefer to make a scandal out of it. You will say, naturally, that Mrs. Payne was called abroad by the exigence of legal adjustments,—you will hint at a larger estate than is really mine. It will not hurt your position to exaggerate in this case, it will increase your wonder."

How pitilessly she knew him, riddled him through and through!

"You will add," she went on,—"that happily your Uncle Steven Randall, of whom she is devotedly fond, is with her in your place. You will add, apropos, a few plausible details of some new state secret, that keeps so important a man as the honourable Raleigh Payne tied to his government for the moment, however against his will. You will admit the sacrifices a public man is often obliged to make."

Then with an arrogance and finality that would have done credit to the wizened old Countess de

Lamoureux in her insolent prime, Stephanie drew herself, slender and uncompromising and triumphant, to her utmost stature, and dismissed him,— unheard. It was incredible. But what had he to say? What could he have said? At least just then?

She was right. He had cared most for her contribution to his success. And he had it still. She had covered his every possibility of attack. It remained an open question as to the avenging of Nicolai Heathleagh. Stephanie had squared the dead man's account as to the poems, but had his own avenging been so subtle or so satisfactory, after all? It was almost the first misgiving Raleigh Payne had ever been forced to contemplate in his unmistakable upward career, and it was unpleasantly blended with a curiosity as to how much the priest had been told by her in confession, and how implicitly he might be relied upon to keep his own counsel.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ROYAL WAY OF THE CROSS

IT was very still at Sky High in those first days after Steven Randall's unexpected departure with Stephanie. He had raised no least objection to accompanying her. He took it all as a matter of course, on her representation of her need of him. Servants and friends were alike confounded by the nonchalance with which he left his lounging chair for an ocean voyage in mid winter,—and not even the alleviation of the southern route before him, at that. The excitement of preparation, and the actual getting off improved his spirits in spite of sinister predictions and much shaking of heads on the part of a disapproving chorus. Perhaps he did not so much care just where death overtook him, so long as it found him doing the right thing.

It occurred to Raleigh, that the weariness of waiting for release might well have become intolerable to a man with the habit of the world in his past as thoroughly as it had been in that of Steven Randall. Everything had been decided so suddenly that they were gone before even the immediate household realised their intention to the full

extent or enormity of the invalid's recklessness.

The miracle of peace seemed to have been wrought in Stephanie's soul. She who had paced her room as restlessly as any nun denied the sacrament on Good Friday,—harried by her distrust of Raleigh and his intention toward her, as well as her speculation as to the true nature of Lawrence Trent's love for her, seemed to have been touched by a divine release. With perfect gentleness, and yet remote as a faithful star, she shone upon them all with equally distant sweetness. She forgave perhaps hoping to be forgiven. Possibly she only drew herself away from an alien environment in a manner to give as little pain as she could, too thankful for her liberation to think of the distance she was putting between herself and the man whose face was still her vision.

At the last moment, on the last morning when the trunks were being carried out, and the hall doors stood wide and heartless to the intrusion of the cold, Joel Underwood, with gall and wormwood in his manner, had brought Stephanie a prodigal bunch of heliotrope. It was a contradiction of his life principles more eloquent than any verbal farewell. It was in reality an apostasy.

"They'll fade, of course," he remarked bitterly, "sooner than camellias or carnations would. But while they last they'll smell sweet, and nothing lasts long, anyhow."

The pain at her throat had almost cut her as she thanked him with outstretched hand, remembering how frail and transient the sweetest memories of Sky High had been to her, and would always be.

Joel did not say he should hope to see her back soon. He was not given to indulging in futile amenities. He expected the worst and was inured to its varied forms of attack. In this upheaval he recognised something analogous to an early frost or unseasonable rose lice, and he was not a shallow optimist to make light of its portentous disaster. He resigned his stems of purple fragrance to Mrs. Raleigh Payne, very much as he would have laid them with equal decorum upon the lid of her coffin. His manner, as he withdrew, was a nice shade between the funereal and the reproving.

Raleigh put her in the car, kissing her without any jot of difference in his manner, and saying loud enough for the servants to hear without listening,—“Have a good voyage, darling, and cable from Cherbourg! Write just how you find things, without fail. I wish I could run over with you, but Uncle Randall will be as good as a dozen husbands! If it was not for this sudden cold of mine I should go to town too, and see you off, at least. Don’t let Uncle Randall over-tax himself, will you? Jim Trent will attend to everything his man cannot do. And by the way, where is

Uncle Randall? There is not any time to waste."

Steven Randall stood in the hall. His face was a tragedy of parting with all he held most sacred and most dear. Raleigh was shocked to silence at sight of it. The portraits of his ancestors looked down upon him too, mute and stern in their heavy frames, to chide or to exhort as one might construe their painted purpose. He broke the tensivity of the situation, only by a determination to interfere at any cost.

"Uncle Steven, do not go!" he cried impulsively. "Let me entreat you before it is too late. This winter voyage is madness. Let me send a woman with Stephanie, but do not sacrifice yourself, and perhaps rush to your own death, for a mere bit of Quixotism!"

Randall's grave eyes rested on one beloved vista after another, seen perhaps through these windows for the last time, except as memory would repeat them. His gaze strayed through the open library door to his books, and back to the frozen garden framed by the crimson curtains that almost lent a warmth to the sleeping hearts of his flowers beneath the snow. Then holding himself erect, he replied curtly, with a ring of steel in his voice that cut to the quick:

"The sins of men are mine, not those of angels, Raleigh. I have never feared death, or failed a woman who trusted me. I am nearing seventy,

and it is too late for me to unlearn my creed. It is no further to paradise from Vienna than from Sky High, if God and you are one! And the woman who is waiting for me, being an angel, will 'remember and understand.'"

It was in the hush of one of those first afternoons, that the bell rang harshly, echoing as bells will, almost as if possessed of vindictive consciousness of their broken connection with humanity.

The message repeated at the door was a spare one. It took but a moment to repeat it. And it was Raleigh Payne this time, who stood alone at the window and watched the irate back and stiffly uncompromising shoulders of Jim Trent's younger brother down the driveway; exactly as Stephanie had done on an afternoon in early spring, the first Sunday after their chance meeting at the cottage of Christine.

Father Mayhew was, or supposed himself to be, reading his breviary, as he walked up and down the south side of the building sanctified as a parish house, adjoining the church and parochial school. He had risen before dawn to attend the call of a presumably dying man,—who had inconsistently improved on his arrival,—and returned to officiate at one of the several early offices. His luncheon had been over by a little past noon, and

the warmth of the sun and sense of momentary lull from the active exercise of his religion was grateful. It was one of those innocent and benign ministrations of Nature, that even the strictest priest may allow himself without reproach, if he neglects no duty, leaves no penance unperformed thereby.

The narrow garden enclosed by a high wall was in wintry ruin of course. A few rose leaves only held to their vines, where the hips and haws were already frozen. One meagre patch of mignonette had somehow braved or escaped the frost, and made a deathly sort of sweetness, as he turned each time at the corner, where an uneasy, unsympathetic east wind cut through his summer habit. He was musing vaguely now upon the tenacity of such sweet, frail things, as he walked.

He had been a priest at heart from boyhood; always, one might say. Rigour had no repulsions for his seasoned soul, yet to-day strangely enough he basked in the chill sunshine, noted the passing of the flowers with that pathetic love of them noticeable in celibates, and even scattered a few crumbs for the doves on the church roof opposite; prolonging his usual quarter of an hour to nearly double his wonted time. The path he trod led past a long porch with a bricked floor, trellised over with grape vines and shut in at one end by the building. The long wooden settle, that ran

the entire length, was sheltered from the wind, and even in winter afforded a possible place for a noon-day rest. Indeed the winter as Sky High knew it never penetrated this more southerly location, and was always a backward guest, coming late and hastening away before it became too unwelcome. To-day Father Mayhew had already reached the porch on his way back to the house, when a visiting card was brought to him by a young lay brother, who coughed as the east wind penetrated his lungs with its contracting shiver. Father Mayhew chided him gently for venturing into the open air bare-headed, and pursued his inquiry as to his care of himself and progress toward health, for the moment oblivious of the errand that had brought him. Then pausing on his way in, he bade the visitor sent to him there. The name on the card meant nothing to him. But as Lawrence Trent stood in the whitewashed arch of the doorway, for an instant his likeness to a Carlo Dolci saint in the Pitti palace, struck him so forcibly that he believed he must have known the man before. One had only to throw the liliated velvet vestment over his shoulders, halo the head with its pale brow and deep-set, ascetic eyes, to remove every trace of the modern secular. His scrutiny was returned, if he had been less preoccupied to observe it, but his own face kept its secrets well under the habitual mask of the priest.

Trent could not define the impression he got of it, even to himself. He had always held that the faces of priests came under three classifications: those of frank satisfaction, those of mortal resignation, and the melodramatic stamp of those who enjoy the prominence of the part and play it consciously. Under none of the three could he place the man before him, who waited with dignity, yet all possible encouragement of manner, for him to begin the explanation of his own presence there. After the exchange of a grave and formal greeting he was at loss how to begin. What was there to say? How was he to introduce the errand that had so impulsively brought him? Father Mayhew noticed his confusion and making it his own, assumed himself the one at fault, saying as if to excuse a lack of memory on his part:

"You will pardon me my failure to remember your name? My duties are among so many hundreds of men. We have met before undoubtedly, but I must ask you to remind me of the circumstances."

"It is I who should ask pardon for intruding upon your solitude," Trent began, but Father Mayhew waived his apology. "It is never an intrusion for a priest to be sought by one who has need of him," he said assuringly. "All his people are equally his to care for, as he is theirs to serve."

"I have not even that justification," Trent ad-

mitted with regret. His voice always dropped at the end of his sentences, as if too wistful or too weary to bear the burden of his feeling to the end. The priest noted it.

"Will you sit down?" he asked, motioning to the wooden bench. "Or do you prefer to go indoors? The afternoon fire is not lighted yet, and the open air is really less chill in the sun."

Trent acquiesced in silence. "The outlook here is contracted," Father Mayhew continued, trying to put him at his ease, "but the opportunity for the spirit to soar is perhaps doubly enhanced,—to the church and heaven beyond the church." As he spoke the wind crept closer through the vines and a few of the remaining rose leaves shuddered and fell. He turned to Trent kindly, but as if to remind him that time counted, even in sacred matters, and the days of summer were already long gone by.

"How can I help you?" he begged. A heavy bell chimed one. Trent started. That was the hour Stephanie dreaded most to hear toll at night,—the supernatural hour. Instantly its association flashed her before him. He saw her and all his need for love,—and the necessity of its abnegation pressed upon him and urged him on—

"I do not know how you can help me,—or that you can help me. I only know I want help," he confessed.

"We all need that sooner or later, at some time in our lives, but of what sort? What has failed you in which you trusted?"

Trent arose and stood before the priest. He folded his arms, holding his elbows in his hands in his old characteristic grip, denoting extreme effort at self-control. "I came because a Catholic once asked me to come," he said.

"What was his name?"

"It was not a man."

There was a silence during which the pigeons gurgled contentedly from the church roof. The priest also arose. "If you came for confession," he suggested, "shall we not go inside?" motioning toward the open door of the church as he spoke.

"It is only a lay confession," Trent explained rather reluctantly, "for I am not of your communion. I am an Anglican Catholic. May I speak to you, never-the-less, under the seal of the confessional, but informally?"

"Assuredly, my dear son. And may God give you his blessing upon your holy impulse to seek counsel and guidance from his priests!" He traced the sign of the cross between them, and re-seated himself, but Trent remained standing respectfully.

"Mrs. Raleigh Payne sent me to you," he said, without further prelude.

"Yes. Why?" Father Mayhew's countenance evinced no more curiosity or interest even, than the bleak side of the grey stone wall untouched by the scant sunshine.

"Because you are her confessor and I am her lover." His mouth, that the priest had thought saintly, had the set beauty of martyrdom now.

"Avowedly?" The question was crucial.

"What do you mean by avowedly?"

"I mean does she know it? Is the relation recognised between you, and of how long standing, — to what degree of sin?"

"There has been no sin,—that is —"

Father Mayhew did not wait for the conclusion of the sentence. "You are hardly in a condition to judge, since the light of the world even can be put out by a blind passion," he said with more patience than rebuke. "I am obliged from the nature of my sacred office to repeat my question. It is of vital importance technically or spiritually, since a reserved confession from her would only heighten her guilt, and the absolution given be worse than none, rendering her soul doubly imperilled."

"Avowedly; innocently in the sight of the law."

"But in the sight of God?"

Trent faced him hotly. "Who is innocent in the sight of God? She is another man's wife and

I love her more than anything in the world!" he cried.

"Then you will not destroy her hope of the next." The earnest words were full of faith in him, and confident of his right desire.

Trent's face was like a sacrificial flame. It was the priest's turn to be silenced, as he heard him say with a sort of desperation,—“You think me a blasphemer and an adulterer at heart. I am not, nor is she. She was sold to a man who pursued her for his own ends, a man who loves himself and his own career better than his wife or his God. We met by no effort of our own, and loved in spite of ourselves. I fought inch by inch from the first moment, with prayer and fasting, and then with the worldly weapons of travel, distraction, change. I barricaded myself behind self-respect, I took every antidote I knew, and no forgetfulness came —”

Still the priest did not speak.

“Of course you think her whole duty is toward her faultless paragon of a husband. You condemn me as a spiritual outcast and you approve him because he has not wronged her by common infidelity. He has your sanction to destroy her life and forbid her religion, but because he is her husband you will not dispense any form of relief from this domestic oppression!”

“She has been deprived the exercise of her re-

ligion, you said?" Father Mayhew asked. He had pondered not a little on the sequence of that single confession, on the occasion of his summer mission in those New Hampshire hills. The young French priest, Father Damaré, associated with him for a few months, had prodded him as to the spiritual welfare of this daughter of the French convent of the Holy Mother, whose Superior was deeply concerned for the outcome of her marriage with a heretic. His attention narrowed as Trent went on.

"From the first every obstacle has been put in her way. It is easy for a man in power to thwart a woman, without seeming to do it intentionally! She was forbidden to go to you or send for you. He took her right of appeal for your sacred guidance from her, and now he takes her right of consolation from her, and her poor heart is distracted, torn, with no one to sustain her! We love each other, but it is a sin. They are nothing to each other, and theirs is a virtuous marriage on both sides, without love. What can we do? Help us! She felt that you could. She must have known you could, for she told me when the memory of our parting became unbearable, to go to you. She felt that in the divine resource there must be some way known to your wisdom alone. When marriage is a farce it is a profanation of the sacrament, and its object is blasphemed while

the highest feeling of the holy of holies is outraged. What is religion for, if it is not to right such wrongs? God is love,—at least He says so.”

“God is love, He is never lust,” the priest corrected gravely.

The blood flamed in Trent’s face, then sank, leaving him whiter than before.

“My poor child!” Oh, the compassion on the priest’s face now, as he spoke,—yet was it entirely compassion? “I know so much more, and deeper than you suppose! I am Mrs. Raleigh Payne’s confessor. I have received constant solicitude for her from her spiritual director abroad. Her grandmother, who so recently died in the faith, was continually instigating efforts on her behalf. The faithful never relax their vigilance. There is more extenuation for her than you conceive or a priest may admit, bound by the seal. Do not misunderstand me as raising guilty hopes or extending encouragement for their satisfaction, but even a priest may admit milder penance for sin under circumstances of heretical oppression. It shall be accorded her. Be at peace in that respect. There is but little more I can say to you”—he paused, and lifted his searching eyes to those of the man before him. “If you were of my own communion—” he suggested. “Why are you not?”

“It is strange that I should have come to you

to-day," Trent replied frankly, "when the chief objection to me in the Roman Catholic faith has always been the confessional. I have always professed to scorn the idea of a man between my conscience and God!"

"It is more strange that you could feel so, when God has always chosen that way, always ordained a man to do the most divine and revealing work upon earth. It is a mistake of men outside the faith, to think of a confessor as a wall, when they should think of him as a bridge. You cannot see for yourself. You are blinded by human desire. The flesh cries out for human nearness, but in nearness of spirit only is there real delight. Intimacy between mortals is an idea only. It cannot exist. It leaves a space between, that no possible contact can efface. The communion of saints is a never-ending celebration. Let your soul long for contact in spiritual communion, for the human can never assuage, and the divine Unapproachable is the only lasting ideal that can never disappoint because man can never prove it reached. It stimulates but never satiates. Confession is salutary, and comforting even if one stumbles and falls in his noble effort after perfection."

"And even if a man sinned again, would he find forgiveness in your eyes?"

Father Mayhew realised how much harder upon himself this pure spirit would be, than any whose

voluntary confession was the result of inured habit. He saw that evil was sickening and strange to this troubled soul, and so he told him gently of the good Saint Filippo Neri, and a youth refused absolution. How the Saint absolved him freely, only imposing another confession should he relapse, how three days later he returned with the same sin upon him, and for a month this went on, till victory was gained and the youth reached a stage of angelic perfection.

"Some sins one might break from"—Trent said wistfully, at the conclusion. "I have always considered love was a virtue. It is hard to see it in an ugly light, with crime and the brood of outer darkness."

"There are mortals and venials," Father Mayhew reminded him. "Temporary fires suffice for the '*minuta peccata*.' There are penances varying from pilgrimages, fasts, and daily religious exercises, to the giving of alms, acts of mercy, and the lighter forms of advice and prayer open for your release from the stain that has soiled your soul."

"I have confessed!" Trent said stolidly, his arms not once unfolded. "Inflict any punishment upon me, only let me love her! Find some way that we may hold to each other without sin! Some way to thwart the awful laws of death and the shrouded secret of first cause, the desolation of

passion, the utter contradiction of love in temptation!"

Father Mayhew's hands tightened on his breviary. "Temptation is not reserved for the laity, my son," he warned, as if in the presence of a visible antagonist. "The terrible temptations of the sacerdotal career you know nothing of. You will find many an unworthy priest who holds himself blameless if he has given no scandal. It has always been so. But the laxity and rigour of penance and its saving grace, only divine wisdom can ever effect with perfection of justice."

"Yes, and even if you absolved me, and I performed whatever you bade me, my sin would be ever before me," was the unspoken answer of Trent's own heart. And yet if Stephanie's conscience could be disburdened, could he not risk his own punishment? Ought he not, since he had assisted at the tragic linking of their fates? And while he speculated thus, Father Mayhew was tempted with a different form of evil. To him, murder was less a sin than deliberate heresy. Voting for a liberal had cost more than one Catholic his sacramental privilege. He was, like every priest, unscrupulous without hesitation in resorting to control of the ballot in matters of Catholic education for Catholic children. Raleigh Payne had fought against this use of the confessional, with his party behind him, supporting his denun-

ciation of it as abuse detrimental to the liberal principles of American democracy. The political struggle was already assuming, in some quarters, the definiteness of an issue. The Church had reason to strike and strike hard, and the adversary being a heretic and in error had, in the priestly mind, no defence. The secrecy of the confessional had put a slight but most important weapon in his hand. He had only to concede his motive sufficient excuse to expose a dishonesty, which though in itself unpolitical, would argue for a flaw in the spotless character of a man urgent against the Catholic interest. The breach in secrecy could be covered in a way that would perfectly conceal its origin. Neither the priest nor his penitent would ever suffer from the exposure of Raleigh Payne. There were subtle channels, hidden agencies, and here now was a man,—who needed only the shadow of a hint of the truth to bring about the same result without other intervention.

The two men were far apart, yet curiously united by the undercurrents of their thoughts as they stood deliberating their situation. Lawrence Trent had no clew as to what was passing in the mind of Father Mayhew. When he spoke, it was to throw himself on the priest's resourceful intuition again.

"I am walled in by two inevitables," he said. "The facts are as they are. If I could change I

would. But I cannot. Even if she forgot all her sanctity of soul, I could not outrage God. I have got to go on being myself. I want only one thing more than I want her. I fear only one thing more than living without her. It is physical pain, it is deadening paralysis of my will, to love as I am doomed to, but there is a blacker abyss than life without love, and that would be life without God. I cannot imagine it. There must be some way to reconcile the two loves. I do not know what is right or possible for her, or for me. You are a man of clarified vision and sacred life. It is your profession to help those who trust in you. What life is there for us, except in death? The mortal death of Raleigh Payne or our own eternal damnation? If you know, by whatever means, of any possible reason to justify us for what we have already done, or to save us from worse, for God's sake forget you are a priest, and be man enough to guide us by your knowledge of the case, no matter how you came by it!"

Father Mayhew's face was not free from perplexity. He laid a restraining hand on Trent's arm, as if to mutely counsel patience and fortitude—"Pain is holier than joy, being a reflection of the crucified," he suggested—

"There are crucifixions and crucifixions!" Trent broke in. "And the mortal misery of our latter-day sort is that they do not save a world,

or often even the souls we die to save!" He stopped himself with visible effort, and said quietly, with that touch of weariness that betrayed long effort at control, "I am shocking you, of course, but let me show you all my impiety! I rage that God made man so that a woman can un-do his will. Why is his reason set aside by the thought of her? What is this savage craving in him, that stalks unabated after centuries of our boasted civilisation? Where is a man safe, or his honour unassailable, if he is to be undermined in spite of his religion and his duty, so that nothing is left to him but a face—or the awful lack of one? Do not blame her!" he cried suddenly, terrified lest he had seemed to do so himself,—“When she comes to you for consolation, as she surely will, in spite of him, give her all gentleness, all hope, for it is never the woman's fault. I did it. I am the one to suffer.”

The priest said nothing to show what was passing beneath the surface of his thoughts. “Love of the flesh is a flame, soon blown out”—he urged, soothing the torn spirit as if it belonged to a little child,—“it is an appetite soon sated, unstable, temporal, unequal to the cloudy music made by angelic rapture of a victorious triumphant soul. You have passed through deep waters, and may all you have suffered and all the tribulation you may in future bear from your wrong desires, be

to you for absolution! My son, temptation takes many forms. It is not alone the devil's instrument to destroy a soul, but God's own visitation of grace to insure a tried perfection. It is written for our edification by one of the most blessed of the Saints, that temptation is profitable, for in it a man is humbled, and you have yourself profited, in that you have distrusted your own strength and pride in coming here, taking the first step toward the only true Way. For it is written, 'Thou art man and not God. Thou art flesh and not angel.' Angels in heaven have fallen, as did the first man in paradise. There was never Saint that was not tempted. What does it matter, if suffering attains unto salvation? If there were any better thing than suffering Christ would have shown it!" He paused, and after a few moments of inward struggle, known only to himself, continued earnestly, with lowered voice,—“A priest may not reveal, but he may safely counsel from, the confession of a sinner. His temptation may come in that holy guise, to be overcome not by his own power but the grace of the cross,—reminding him that evil may not be done that good may come of it. For it is written that if a man cast away the cross he will surely find another. And as another Saint has written,—‘thou shalt ever find the cross, the cross is ever ready and ever awaits thee. Thou can'st not escape it wherever thou shalt run or go.

Thou carriest thyself with thee and shall ever find thyself. But go where thou wilt, seek what thou wilt, there is no higher way above or safer way below than the way of the holy cross'!" If Father Mayhew had wrestled for his own victory, forgetful of Trent, the light in his eyes was assurance of deliverance from his momentary impulse of revenge. "I must leave you for a time," he said, as the bell struck the half hour. "Meditate on the eternal truth, here or in the church. Wait for me, or go if you will, and God be with you and give you the only true peace and light!"

"Only one moment more,"—Trent begged, as if waking from a trance. "There is one question I must ask, for the sake of purity and my faith in women forever. It is the question that brought me here to-day. I do not ask you to tell me where she is. I ask only, as she told me to ask of you, if in your sight she has been blameless in the past? I mean until this present fault for which I am responsible. Her husband has sworn to the contrary. You are her confessor—" he did not finish. The inference was too obvious.

Father Mayhew was silent. To what might his answer lead? The importance of its issue made him pause and consider. And again the reverend Father did not so much blame the woman for her present weakness. Her husband was a heretic and

a bitter partisan in the recent fight against the parochial educational interests; opening wedge of the detested modernism. Raleigh Payne stood pledged to all the Catholics opposed. For a moment the sacred priest and astute politician buried in Father Mayhew came to the surface face to face. If this man had lied once—twice—he would again. He need not hurry event. If he merely pronounced this woman blameless, would it mean that in future she was to be respected and given over, a victim of heretical oppression? Or if blameless, and her husband thereby branded a liar, would human antagonism aroused in the lover before him, seek its own satisfaction, and the Church find a swift and hidden avenger? What man would hear the honour of the woman he loved falsely accused? On the contrary he had only to refuse to answer, to insure her from further illegitimate pursuit, since no man would follow a light woman far, if his was a nature possessed by righteousness, such as the man now before him had unconsciously revealed. He could save the woman by a compromising silence. He could also save the lover,—perhaps for the priesthood. He could expose the husband by one condemning word, and since she who made the confession had given him liberty to speak, there would be no breach of the sacred seal implied. What was best, holiest, for them all, he was hard pressed to

determine without discrediting the woman's record by seeming to hesitate.

It was the decision of but a moment. Trent waited, without seeming to breathe.

"She is blameless," was the brief response. Truth had won, through the priestly habit of implicit obedience regardless of individual reason.

Father Mayhew returned to find the porch empty. The east wind complained, and the rasping of the dry branches alone broke the silence of the afternoon. But prayer would follow and unfailingly shield the faithful, and God knew where the boy was, and would protect him. He felt reasonably sure that he would come back. The Church had been less stern with that young soul than he had been with himself. Even a priest could not hold the same degree of harshness as the uncompromising rigour of youth toward its first grave fault.

And Trent meantime, in one of his vivid reactions from monk to minstrel, had let himself out of the garden; the mood of passioning cities calling him to life, rather than the killing of self and mortifying of desire, and filled with the one supreme purpose of going to Stephanie, wherever she was, to tell her what a dupe he had been. He knew now that she loved him. It was a lie that she had ever loved that other man! He wanted

only to abase himself for his vile distrust of her, to make her know how gloriously her disdain of self-vindication had skied her in his love. That was all. And for him that was enough. He had been absolutely sincere in his fortnight of renunciation and asceticism, and he was absolutely unaffected in his return to the joy of the world. That was Trent, for better or for worse! He was his own cross as Father Mayhew had shrewdly suspected.

As he boarded the flying express train for New York, the prayer of Saint Augustine was sub-consciously his: "O God, make me good,—but not now!" The Catholic communion dwelt on the killing of self, and he had never cared so much to live before. To be alive in bodily sense, in mental vigour! Was it a fit ending for a career of promise favourably begun, to throw away the honours he had already won? To ignore the talent that only secular life could fully develop? The words of Grandee, not those of the priest, clung to him approved, and would not let him go,—“Remember, there is no value in a useless sacrifice. Do not be a fool for Christ’s sake. Use your reason in all things.”

Ah, yes, Grandee knew what life meant, and life abundantly too. He himself cared little for society, but he had his books, his music, his studies, and now this provocative, sweet, adorable, proud

woman creature, who tormented him and aroused all his protest and anger against her control over him, and yet gave life again all the colour and aroma he had ever hoped or dreamed. He would find her, tell her — and the world might end or begin there, as she willed.

CHAPTER XXV

THE SIN OF ANGELS

WHATEVER remorse or compunction Raleigh felt, he exhausted in punctilious attention to every detail of Sky High's care and ordered procedure in the absence of the master. Everything was to go on just as usual. The horses would be exercised daily, only an extra maid or two would be dispensed with. When the sunshine called loudly enough to wake the daffodils and jonquils, the bulbs would prick up in the familiar corners and be followed by the customary gorgeous sequence of bloom, to find him or find him not, as it might happen. But Joel would grimly help them to do their part toward his absent or present delight in the ancestral home that enshrined his heart. Still Raleigh lingered on. There was nothing to keep him, and no society beyond his own or that of the villagers, and they never stepped out of their tracks to avail themselves of his conversation; merely passing the time of day if they chanced to meet him upon the highway; letting well enough alone, after the habit of taciturnity bred by lives aloof from interchange

of opinion, or absorbed in the daily struggle for existence.

Christine, warned by Jim's solicitude for his brother mute and miserable, had rushed up from town to lay matters before Grandee, only to find him gone, and Raleigh in an unsatisfactory state of civil platitude, sweeping over her concern for them all, and excusing himself for being there by the accumulated press of affairs he had found awaiting him on his return. She had invaded the library and his innermost counsel, without apology.

"You look very handsome in your black furs. How is Jim?" he asked, after the first greetings had been exchanged and the blow of Grandee's departure somewhat softened. If he hoped to turn her aside to some less vital topic, he was not flattered by his success, for she disowned his attempt openly.

"What has happened, really?" she demanded. "What does it all mean,—Stephanie dashing off to Europe at this season and Grandee looking like a steel engraving when your name is mentioned, and Lawrence not sleeping and growing to look more like a Catholic Saint in a dirty Italian church, every day?"

"Then you have seen Uncle Steven?" he suggested. She had overlooked her own contradiction in her troubled haste to make Raleigh talk to

her freely. She saw her blunder and blushed for it glowingly.

"No, I have not seen him," she replied, "but Jim told me how he looked. Of course no one could have imagined he was sailing without saying good-bye, or telling any of us his plans!"

"It was rather sporty, was it not?" Raleigh said, smiling appreciatively. "He promised to let Jim see to everything that his own man servant might not prove equal to."

"We heard nothing of them, knew nothing, until Jim met Grandee on his way out of the bank where he deposits. They chatted a few minutes, and then Doctor Wylin drove up in his car and took Grandee in, and Jim supposed there was nothing more in it than a little trip to town with a consultation for objective. Afterward he recalled how Grandee changed, when he answered the inquiry for your health and next move on the political chess board."

"And so you came post haste to scold me, because Uncle Randall was clever enough to keep his affairs to himself and leave you all in the dark!" He refused to treat any of it as mysterious or surprising.

Christine drew a straight, hard chair nearer the table and sat down. "You have got to tell me everything, Raleigh, so why trouble to beat about the bush? I cannot help any of you unless I

know what is at the bottom of all this muddle. And I must help you, because I love you all, and because Jim must not take the time or be worried about anything until he has finished the stupendous case he is in. I came to stop his worrying about Lawrence, and help him keep his mind clear for his work. So please be frank and spare me your diplomatic tendencies."

Raleigh repeated his lingo in regard to the inheritance of Stephanie from her grandmother, the importance of her immediate presence at Vienna, his uncle's unwillingness to have her go without one of them, and his own inability to get away at just this present time. She was too polite to show him that she did not believe him, but he had more difficulty in getting her to understand why he remained where he was, when all there was to do had been done, than he had ever had to make her believe anything, since he had first met her in his plausible college days. For once Christine was unconvinced. He did his best to be obvious and she rejected his effort, saying, "You cannot be in your right mind to stay up here alone, with nothing to do! Doctor Wylin would be far more exercised about your apathy than he ever was about your energy."

"But I am doing things," he pleaded. "I have got six months of back work to catch up."

"But why here? You have always hated the

quiet here, even in summer with the house crowded," she objected.

"The reason I like it now is very simple. I can work so much faster uninterrupted." She read her own conclusion without his words.

"You are very much changed, Raleigh. What has changed you?" she asked sharply, suspecting him of fending her off and hurt by his inclination.

"Perhaps my long stay in the woods unfitted me a bit, to take the first plunge into the whirl of city life again."

"It ought to be the very time when you are mad for it!"

"I seem to have lost my taste for the scramble, for the moment. It will come back. I am very comfortable here, and I had meant to give myself a chance to accomplish some quiet brain work, before I opened my winter campaign."

"I do not believe one word you are saying!" she cried. "You are lying low for some unprecedented 'coup.' Own up that you are!"

He deprecated her prediction with a genuine denial. "I am working, catching up the dropped threads, and exercising,—that is all," he confessed. Even with Christine he was prudent.

"That is not all," she said, accenting the all, "unless you are really down and out physically."

"On that score there is nothing to worry about," he assured her. "I am even now dictating the policy of one or two strenuous new companies here and abroad, on a gigantic scale of combination, capitalised up in the multi-millions. I am also outlining the duties of several newly appointed members of the general Consular service, who do not in the least know their job, or what is expected of them."

"Everything comes your way!" Christine murmured with delight. "The government will wake up some day and realise whose hand is the power behind the machine. They ought to be dreaming it now, and soon open their eyes."

"Oh, this is nothing of any account," he said. "These lads are sent over to outlandish places, without training as to their rights or functions, and unfamiliar with everything from the geography of the country, to its language and law. Their fathers were useful in matters best known to the administration, and honours were, accordingly, easy for the sons. If I were Secretary of State, or Foreign Affairs, I would—" Christine drew a sharp breath.

"You ought to have it and you will some day," she broke in. "Ever so many men have said so. Senator Fordyce told Jim you would get the Treasury appointment now, if you were not so young. It is only that which stands in your

way! How Stephanie could be such a blind baby as not to see the glory of you! And to throw what little power she had, into your scale! You must let me speak, Raleigh"—she protested, as he drew dissenting brows. "I have kept still too long already, until it is too late to be of real practical service to her or to you, I am afraid. But I do hope and pray that you are not going to sit down and mope and mourn over her. Let her come or go! What is it to you? A woman is only good to supplement a man, to amuse him, and rest him, and make him believe in himself in the face of every discouragement. If she is not for this, what is she, but a drag upon him? You are a man to whom the country looks for shining service, because your honour is untarnished and unapproachable. Senator Ellerson called you the Galahad of politics, at the New England dinner, and everybody applauded. Never let yourself be unhorsed by a woman who cannot appreciate the pride of her position as your wife. Who cannot give you a free rein now on the winning stretch in! Why, look at Jim!"

"Yes, you have made Jim," Raleigh admitted. "You have a right to say this."

"I have not un-made him," she claimed with a sweet modesty.

"He is one of the most trusted lawyers in New York to-day, or in America," he stated as if it

was a mere fact, needing no re-inforcement from him.

"He has gone ahead," Christine said, with a brilliant smile, fond as it was proud.

"He certainly has, and he will be Attorney General before he dies, if you keep after him and his health holds firm."

"Do you believe it, Raleigh?" Her eyes flashed, but she added quietly, "I would not predict improbabilities, if I were you,—even to please an old friend. And do not repeat it to any one else, for fear they might think your own judgment less trustworthy where your personal friends are concerned." How she guarded him, even against her own interests! He was deeply touched by this evidence of her unremitting jealousy for his attainment.

"Own up, Chris, you have it at the back of your own mind?" he insisted.

"In my dreams, perhaps."

"And why not?" he sighed, for the first time showing his depression openly. "There is no door shut before a man with a wife who lives his life, as you do with Jim. You women have it all in your own hands, after all."

"That we do not is proven by the case in point," she dissented. "But, Raleigh, do not let Stephanie drag you back. Go on! Go on alone! Stephanie can add nothing to, and take nothing

from, your success. The goal is almost within reach and you must not let your private affairs blur your public sense. She does not understand or accept our American interpretation of love or life. Let her take her own little personal share of this big universe, and gratify her own little selfish joy. She cannot rise to you! She cannot even appreciate your height enough to spare you the only vague reflection on your honour it has ever known,—the natural imputation of her leaving you now.”

“I have failed with Stephanie,” he said. It was the first admission of failure he had ever made in his life.

“It is not too costly a failure,” she said heartily, “but for Jim’s sake as well as your own, the world must not be enlightened as to the actual predicament we find ourselves in. Jim is worried to death over Lawrence. He says it needs only the slightest pressure suddenly applied, or removed, to set him off after Stephanie hot foot. Forgive me for speaking of it, but of course we know he is mad over her. He says nothing. But we do not have to be told. That is in the Trent blood. Deny them anything, and that is the one thing they will have, if they pull the world down on their heads to get it. They are born so. Jim says something, not principle or conscience alone, is holding Lawrence off, now that Stephanie is out of reach and

away from Sky High. He cannot find out what it is, or get any hint of it, even with his training for evidence. He thinks this money she has inherited would only hold Lawrence back, but knowing Lawrence, I think if once he overcomes her past —”

“Her past?” Raleigh repeated involuntarily.

“Yes, of course, her having been your wife. My idea is that if Lawrence gets past the sin of that, he will not stop for a mere detail of money. Any one can make money, there is no especial force in that for an American. So we must count on you to assert yourself and avert a catastrophe, —under the surface of course, where it will all sink peacefully down to oblivion.” In vain Raleigh reassured her as to the groundlessness of her fears. She would not go.

“Why do women always delight in imagining a ghost, Chris? Suppose Trent did have a passing fancy for Stephanie? Most men have. And he will never throw away his life for another man’s wife. Go home to the children and sleep in peace!”

“Well, if I do, will you come down and talk to Lawrence?” She was for any bargain, it seemed, that drew him away from this solitude.

“I have.”

“Then you two do understand each other? I supposed you did.”

"Yes."

"And you are not concealing anything from me?"

"Nothing but the full force of my admiration." At that she rose and gathered her cloudy furs about her. The bright gold of her hair set her devoted face in more striking relief for the high contrast. She might have been the radiant goddess of the success he worshipped, as she stood there, so brave and undaunted and self-forgetting in her determination to help the universe spin on.

"Stephanie is my wife and Uncle Randall is with her. Everything is safe and conventional," he said. "We shall be as good friends as ever one of these days when I have time to run over and make up with her. I have neglected her a bit savagely of late. But do not worry about us, and do not let Jim magnify his brother's wounds. They are only skin deep. You know that really the only person who cannot jest at wounds is he who never shows a scar,—if the poet did reverse his opinion on that matter. Young Trent took his orders like a veteran. There is nothing to worry about, you see, after all."

"It is no matter whether I worry or not, if you only will not!" she persisted, giving him her hand. "Too much depends on you, to let anything any woman can do weaken your power."

Without realising what he meant to do, he

stooped and kissed the hand within his own. Her simple nobility humbled him and shamed pretension.

"The mills of God do grind fine, Chris, but we grind them ourselves, that is the worst of it. I lost you through my besetting sin. Once I was blind. It was on the start and I have been well paid for it. I can only say, 'they who win heaven, blest are they!' Give my love to Jim," he added, ashamed of his burst of sudden feeling. He stood on the steps as she was driven away, strangely shaken, and unable to account for his weakness in experiencing such rare emotion.

Imperceptibly the days slipped by. It was nearly a month since his strange interview with Stephanie and Lawrence Trent at the Squirrel's Nest, while the fantastic moonlight wove its arabesques about their feet. He was at loss to account for the spell that had been laid upon him. A sort of lethargy robbed the hours of desolation and bound him to the place inexplicably.

He came in later than usual from his tramp in the dusk one evening, and the incongruity of his inertia struck him forcibly for the first time. He had been turning over in his mind his own course toward Stephanie, as he walked. The night before he had read over the lyrics, and their poetic imagination sounded so fatally like intimate cer-

tainty, he had reluctantly been forced to put the worst interpretation upon their bearing on Stephanie's truth. No man reading them could but believe them compromising. And how else was he to justify himself? And if they were what they now seemed to him, why should she not meet remorse with remorse, and let the past be decently interred between them forever? What if he went to her, declared himself at fault? Could he do it? It was what Steven Randall seemed to exact of him. Perhaps she wanted him to think her false, was exciting him to divorce her under any pretext. She would have denounced him when he accused her before Trent, had she not cared too much for him to risk the issue then. Of course it was for the lover not the husband her tongue had frozen.

His indecision enfeebled his action increasingly. Stephanie was the only woman whose personal charm lured him. What if he swept all other considerations aside and bent his knees to her, supplicating to be taken back, and given one chance only to show her that he really loved her as she would be loved?

He almost decided that he would this afternoon, as he tramped the little forest with her faint figure flitting before his inward vision. But what right had she to conceal her past from him? To let him play the knave and fool before her, and

mask it out with him to the very end? She had been deceitful surely, if not unfaithful. She had listened to the first soft voice that sued after marriage, and why not before? And of all people, she whom he had burned to distinguish, knew his one secret, and the price of his honour would always stare at him through her eyes, though all the world acclaimed him. He went back painstakingly over his career, step by step. It had been his pride that his life was free of the random loves of other men. From his first sight of Stephanie, and ensuing disloyalty to Christine, there had been no other woman in his life for whom he must blush. That score was clean. He had preserved the integrity of his body. In the matter of the poems, he had only followed his habit of extorting from life whatever tribute there was to be collected: yielding to his temperamental craving for diadems rather than giving way before an overwhelming temptation. The publication of the lyrics had not been a necessary link for his significant distinction. They afforded only an additional laurel for him to lay at Stephanie's feet. The unimportance of the value for which he had made his mistake was insolent in its increased proportions now. It was having its chance to deal with him heroically too, in his perception of the importance of human relations, viewed with an added insight gained by intense introspection.

Out of it all rose a feeling of outrage against the snare spread for him in his own nature.

The malign influence of his choice left the world untouched. It was only within him that the tyranny of secret fault was exercised. Yet Stephanie, of all the wide ignorant world, was the one who knew! And this had separated them. The long unfolding of his energies had come to nought because of the false kernel of his inmost heart. He had not been instinctively on the safe and right side, when the hidden temptation had crept upon him. The repeated habit, which was character in all men, had not resisted the appeal to take one more laurel, from a dead man's hand, from which there remained no impress leading to identification. Raleigh equivocated even yet, between the evil of Stephanie's discovery of him, and the import of his own wrong-doing. He had held love as something to be done, rather than believed or loved. He had turned his life from poetry to prose on this conviction. He had prospered beyond all expectation. And yet, at thought of the woman he loved, he was disheartened by a strange sense of loss of all that kept life warm, of companionship and physical hope, and a lonesomeness of darkness and alien lands settled over him. She was lovely and young and a stranger in his country, and he had loved her in his own way, without suspicion of his harshness to her, until

she had ceased to desire his affection. In the bare sense of having loved her he seemed to find his only solace now. He recalled phrases of hers, motions, touching images from their first bewildering intimacies. He often dreamed of her, and now her shadow-presence like far away music, or the forms of sleep, passed before him waking, always with averted face but always retaining the old seductive sweetness. He extenuated his crime of the lyrics again, by admitting that if the crisis of his decision had been a great one, if he had met it in open arena as a wrestler, he should have repudiated the first hint of dishonour. But it had come upon him as easily, unconsciously as the hour of the day. The climacteric moment was met and passed, and his life changed forever, while he scarcely knew the hands had been moving across the clock of his fate. And to-night he felt the import of Stephanie's removal of herself from him as an unworthy creature. And he knew that not to have instinctively chosen the straight course was to have failed at the crucial point and opened his life to the enemy.

But whom had he wronged? No one,—and it was to cost him the joy of life! No, no, he had not failed. She was his wife still. He would make her see how it had all come out of his passion to distinguish her. No woman could resist that appeal. He would delay no longer. He

would go to her, would dominate her,—would forgive her— Here he stopped short. And he knew he could never forgive her, because he had wronged her, and she had not wronged him.

That was the crux of the whole matter. That was what kept him agreeing and disagreeing with consecutive schemes of severity or reckless self-reproach. It was absurd of old Wylin to suppose him capable of losing his nerve, whatever happened to him. A man with such iron physique as he! Every day he walked further and faster in derision of such an idea. The break with Stephanie had not acted as a sedative exactly, but he was good for it, he told himself. He was unreconciled to Steven Randall's having turned his back on his own blood, but no one was the wiser for his domestic annoyances. If he felt a slight indisposition to the fray, which had been enough to startle Christine, he felt himself cured to-night, and ready to face and solve the question once for all, that had been so persistently harrying him. He had practically made up his mind. Inclination and expediency counselled the same perfection. Stephanie he would not live without. The certainty that Trent wanted her, and the uncertainty as to what Nicholas Heathleagh might have meant to her, barbed him on the elemental male passion of jealousy, stronger than universal prin-

ciple or rational design. The depression over nothing in particular, that had been weighing him down, seemed lifted. He ate his dinner with a woodman's appetite and drank a bottle of choice claret with a joy in the flavour that impressed him as a good sign. The morning papers did not get to Sky High until evening, which alone showed the difference in his avidity for the news,—and the mail came but once a day in winter, unless he sent a man over for it,—five miles and back,—which he always did. As he sat smoking before the library fire, he heard the sleigh driven in from the post office as usual, and Neptune whinnying for his belated feed. The mail was brought in at once, as methodically as if Steven Randall himself were in command. Raleigh wondered idly, since his uncle trained servants so well, how he would have come out with a wife, if he had attempted one. He called the man back to send a message to the stable, chatting with him in the hearty way that made him so popular with all who served him, then opened his papers. But as the servant stepped back, to ask some direction further for the next day, a sudden purpose animated him to add a positive order for the sleigh, to catch the morning train. After all, he had done all he had accomplished for Stephanie,—why should he lose her now? She would accept that excuse. Any woman would. Again his jealousy flamed up.

She was his. No other man might dare to touch her unless he threw her away.

“Was that all, sir?”

The servant's voice drew him back to realities.

“That is all,—at least if I decide otherwise I will send word to you in time,” he said in dismissal. Again he took up his papers. He tried the stock market first. Steel was up, there were other phenomenally lucky lifts in the stocks that interested him. The foreign dispatches of the associated press came next, then the day's progress at the heart of his own government. He but glanced at the editorials, preferring his own opinions, and as he turned the page his eye fell by chance upon the sailing lists.

Sailing to-day—he read, without caring, or purposing to read on—Killian L. Millish, wife and attendant.

—“So old Millish has played out and Wylin has got him off at last!” he interpolated. And he continued to read down the list, idly making his own comment between the lines as he did so.

Mr. and Mrs. Julian Kemper, daughters and maid.

—“The people who bought Christine's old house in town”—

Mrs. Mary Massey.

—“She buried Massey last week,—poor girl!”—

Honourable C. D. Hemminway.

—"He is over for raw silk concessions"—

Franklin Daggert.

—"Bill Daggert's son who married an actress"—

Ordway VanNess.

—"Crossed with him in September"—

Lawrence Trent 3rd.

He read no further. Trent had followed her then. That settled it. He would go at once. He sat, how long he never knew, going to and fro in his mind over that turning place in his life where the roads had parted, and this present juncture, where they would unite, or separate never to meet again. The official seal, conspicuous on the envelope lying at the top of his pile of disregarded mail, drew his straying glance at last. He had work to get through if he left on the early morning train. He opened the letter that came first, without a hint of its contents, and read without a tremour his own appointment to the vacant place in the Cabinet, tendered him in secrecy and obliging his immediate presence in Washington.

He plunged into his papers and worked till dawn, the old fire in his veins unabated, his private griefs stifled by the public call.

It was daylight when he arose from his desk. All was done. He drew himself up wearily but without a trace of lassitude. He looked older than

in the summer, but the chestnut hair on his full, low brow was untouched by a single thread of grey. His eyes were unmarred by the night's work, lustrous and clear as those of other men after nine hours' sleep. He was handsome and untarnished as the winter morning itself, as he stood for a moment reconsidering his future. Had he really intended to humble himself—allow himself to be drawn from his appointed orbit by a woman? Women hindered. Why should he allow himself to care for a woman's private estimate of his true worth?

For Stephanie, love would suffice. It did not matter who the man was, if he was her lover,—or indeed if he was nothing more. Let her be dazzled back to a submissive place at his side! It was beneath Raleigh Payne to pursue. He had always backed himself at the turning stake, why should he distrust himself now? He threw up his head haughtily,—and frowned to find himself talking aloud. Wylin disapproved of that. Again he picked up the letter and read its contents. This appointment had been his star in the East. It had beckoned and was standing still.

He forgot remorse, and jealousy, and duty to the woman he had sworn to cherish, and even love itself, as he put back the heavy crimson curtains and met the flush of dawn over those cold, white hills. Unconsciously then he wrung his hands as

in his boyhood, repeating as he had in those moments of half sensible reactions of joy in ambition all but within his grasp:

“I may have lost everything else most men hold dearest, but it is coming! God Almighty, it is coming!—It has come!”

And the sudden jangling of discordant sleigh bells, calling him from outside, drowned his latent misgiving in their pealing clamour of applause.

THE END

in yellow



UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



AA 000 284 915 6

